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Preventing A Lost Generation:

Understanding The State of Out of School Children in Myanmar

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1
1. Introduction 3
2. Data and methodology 6
3. Variations in OOSC rates across demographics and geographical locations 8
3.1 Overall state and trend of OOSC 8
3.2 Preprimary school age (5-year-old children) 14
3.3 Primary and secondary 17
4. Challenges and opportunities in education access 27
4.1 Basic profile of OOSC and determinants of out-of-school status 27
4.2 Barriers to access 31
4.3 Current status of the OOSC—What are the OOSC doing now? 34
4.4 Potential opportunities and aspirations 40
5. Conclusions 47
Annex 53

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Profiles of OOSC (6–17-year-old), 2023 (%) 28
Table 4.2: Determinants of schooling status (being out of school) among 6–17-year-old children 30
Table 4.3: Share of upper secondary school-age children (ages 15–17) employed by schooling status and state/region 40
Table A1: Education level and corresponding age and grade groups 53
Table A2: IDPs across states and regions 53

List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Share of children not enrolled in school by gender, 2017–2023 9
Figure 3.2: Share of children not enrolled in school by location, 2017–2023 9
Figure 3.3: Share of children not enrolled in school by location and gender, 2017–2023 10
Figure 3.4: Schooling status of children by age group (2024) 13
Figure 3.5: Schooling status of children by age (2024) 14
Figure 3.6: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by location and gender 15

Figure 3.7: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by wealth group, household head's education level, and language 16
Figure 3.8: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by state or region 17
Figure 3.9: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by age group and gender 18
Figure 3.10: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by age and gender 18
Figure 3.11: Share of primary and secondary OOSC across language and ethnic groups 19
Figure 3.12: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by disability status 20
Figure 3.13: Percentage of children out of school, by age group and wealth group 21
Figure 3.14: OOSC rate by household head's education level 22
Figure 3.15: OOSC rate by location (rural and urban) 23
Figure 3.16: OOSC rate by location (rural and urban) and age 23
Figure 3.17: OOSC rate by state and region 24
Figure 3.18: OOSC rate by conflict intensity across townships 25
Figure 3.19: OOSC rate by time taken to reach the nearest health care facility 26
Figure 3.20: OOSC rate by large outflux of residents 27

Figure 4.1: Reasons for dropping out of school across the years (6–17-year-old children) 32
Figure 4.2: Reasons for dropping out of school by age group and gender and location, 2023 34
Figure 4.3: Share of upper secondary school-age children who are employed by enrollment status and gender 37
Figure 4.4: Share of upper secondary school-age children who are employed by enrollment status and location 38
Figure 4.5: Perception about ways to improve access to education 41
Figure 4.6: Digital literacy in using digital devices among 15–17-year-old children, 2022–2023 43
Figure 4.7: Digital literacy in using internet and related tools among 15–17-year-old children, 2022–2023 43
Figure 4.8: Perception about the importance of education access, 2024 (%) 46
Figure A1: Schooling status of children by age group (2023) 54
Figure A2: Number of people displaced since Feb 2021 and remain displaced (as of June 2024) 55
Figure A3: Number of people internally displaced within Myanmar (as of June 2024) 56

List of Boxes

Box 2.1: Regression models for the determinants of out-of-school status 8

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Abbreviations

AE	Alternative Education
AEQSAF	AE Quality Standard Assurance Framework
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
DAE	Department of Alternative Education
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAYS	Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling
MLCS	Myanmar Living Conditions Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoI	Ministry of Information
MoLIP	Ministry of Labour Immigration and Population
MSPS	Myanmar Subnational Phone Surveys
myME	Myanmar Mobile Education
NFME	Nonformal Middle Education
NFPE	Nonformal Primary Education
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
RAPID	Reach Access Prioritize Increase Develop
SAC	State Administration Council
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
SISU	Step-In Step-Up
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Myanmar has made significant strides in enhancing educational access across all levels in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the education sector faced severe disruptions due to the pandemic and the subsequent military takeover in February 2021. Compounding these challenges, Myanmar's economy has been on a downward spiral since the military takeover, with the World Bank projecting a meager 1 percent growth by March 2024. The spread of conflict has led to displacement, disrupted trade routes, and increased transportation costs, leaving Myanmar's economy about 10 percent smaller than in 2019.

This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the current state of out-of-school children (OOSC) in Myanmar, examining variations in OOSC rates across demographics and geographical locations, identifying determinants of out-of-school status, and exploring challenges and opportunities in education access. The analysis primarily relies on data from the Myanmar Subnational Phone Survey 2024 (MSPS 2024), supplemented by MSPS 2023 and the Myanmar Living Conditions Survey 2017 (MLCS 2017).

Overall, the proportion of OOSC has declined from 28 percent in 2023 to 21 percent in 2024, although this rate still exceeds the 18 percent observed in 2017. The decrease in non-enrollment has been more pronounced for females, with a decline of approximately 10 percentage points, compared to 4.2 percentage points for males. Rural areas continue to bear a higher burden of OOSC compared to urban regions, with 22 percent of rural children aged 5-17 out of school, compared to 17 percent of their urban counterparts.

The report highlights significant variations in OOSC rates across age groups. Among preprimary school-age children (5-year-olds), more than one-third (37 percent) are not enrolled in school. A staggering 45 percent of adolescents aged 15-17 are currently out of school, emphasizing a considerable enrollment challenge in upper secondary education. This dropout rate is particularly concerning because it indicates that many students who have made it through early education stages are unable to complete their secondary education. This not only limits their ability to pursue higher education but also hinders their potential to contribute meaningfully to Myanmar's workforce. Without addressing this issue, Myanmar risks having a significant portion of its future workforce lacking essential skills and qualifications, which is crucial for the country's socio-economic development and competitiveness. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of children are overage for their respective educational levels, with nearly half (45 percent) of lower secondary school-age children (11-14 years) still enrolled in primary school.

Disparities in OOSC rates are evident across states and regions, with Sagaing region exhibiting the highest rates: 20 percent at the primary level, 40 percent at the lower secondary level, and 64 percent at the upper secondary level. Conflict intensity emerges as a key factor influencing OOSC rates, with high-conflict areas experiencing disproportionately higher rates compared to low-conflict areas. In high-conflict areas, the OOSC rate at the primary level is 10 percentage points or over five times that in low-conflict areas.

An analysis of the determinants of out-of-school status reveals that age, language, socioeconomic status, and geographical location are strongly associated with being out of school. Gender disparities are prominent, with females being about 5 percent less likely to be out of school overall, and the most substantial effect observed in upper secondary school-age children, where they are about 14 percent less likely to be out of school compared to males.

Poverty remains a significant barrier to education, with insufficient household income being the primary reason for school dropout, accounting for 60 percent of dropouts before 2019. However, recent years have witnessed an emergence of safety concerns and disengagement from the learning process as key factors leading to dropout. Among students who dropped out between 2021 and 2023, the proportion citing safety concerns ranged from 10 to 17 percent.

The report also sheds light on the current status of OOSC, revealing that a significant proportion are engaged in the labor force. OOSC exhibits a substantially higher employment rate, with a staggering 61 percent engaged in work, as opposed to only 9 percent of their school-enrolled peers. Gender and location emerge as critical factors influencing employment participation, with male OOSC having an 11 percent higher employment rate than their female counterparts, and 64 percent of rural OOSC being employed compared to 53 percent of urban OOSC.

Despite the challenges, the report identifies potential opportunities and aspirations for improving educational access in Myanmar. A staggering 91 percent of respondents agree that bolstering child safety would positively affect the enrollment of children up to the age of 18. Additionally, 85 percent of the population concurs that providing financial subsidies to certain households could enhance school enrollment rates for primary and secondary school-age children. Moreover, 80 percent of respondents agree that increasing teacher salaries can help improve teacher attendance. The Myanmar population holds a positive attitude toward education access and gender equality, with 96 percent agreeing that every child up to the age of 18 deserves and should receive quality education, irrespective of parental income, religion, or race, and 94 percent supporting equal access to education and job opportunities for both men and women.

In conclusion, the report emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address the multifaceted reasons behind school dropout, support overage students in catching up to their age-appropriate grade levels, and combat the prevalence of child labor among OOSC. By harnessing the positive attitudes toward education and implementing strategic policies, Myanmar can strive to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to receive a quality education and fulfill their potential. Investing in education access and quality is crucial for Myanmar's long-term socioeconomic development and the well-being of its future generations.

1. Introduction

Myanmar exhibited commendable progress in enhancing educational access across all levels in the decade leading up to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020. Notably, access increased significantly, with the most substantial improvements observed at the secondary levels, encompassing both lower and upper secondary education (Bhatta and Katwal 2022b; CSO, UNDP, and World Bank 2018). Moreover, the country witnessed a rise in enrollment rates for both males and females, achieving gender parity in net enrollment rates at both primary and secondary levels. Consequently, by 2018, Myanmar had attained favorable global standing, performing on par with its Southeast Asian counterparts in terms of both net enrollment and gender parity at primary and secondary education levels (Bhatta and Katwal 2022b).

However, Myanmar's education system faces significant challenges, with the quality of education lagging regional standards. According to the 2019 Southeast Asia-Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) student assessments, a large majority of grade 5 students in Myanmar demonstrated performance below the minimum proficiency levels in reading and math (UNICEF and SEAMEO 2020). Specifically, a staggering 89 percent of grade 5 students fall below the minimum proficiency threshold in reading, aligning with the World Bank's estimate of Myanmar's learning poverty[1] rate at 89.5 percent for 2019 (Azevedo et al. 2022). This rate considers the SEA-PLM-based estimation of students meeting minimum proficiency in reading and the proportion of out-of-school children (OOSC). Myanmar's performance in both math and reading is below the average of other Southeast Asian countries participating in the SEA-PLM (Bhatta and Katwal 2022a).

The education sector in Myanmar faced severe disruptions due to the pandemic and the subsequent military takeover. In February 2020, the government's response to the pandemic led to the closure of all public schools, a measure that persisted throughout the academic year from June 2020 to February 2021. Following the military takeover in February 2021, there was a brief reopening in June 2021; however, another closure from July to October 2021, possibly due to the third wave of the pandemic, resulted in a total of 532 school closure days over the two-year period from February 2020 to February 2022, setting a record in the East Asia and the Pacific region (Bhatta et al. 2023; Bhatta and Katwal 2022b). The coup further intensified the challenges, with dismissals of education officials and teachers, weakening the public education system. Escalating conflict resulted in attacks on schools, raising safety concerns for students and teachers in several regions of the country. Post-coup mistrust in state institutions, alongside safety concerns, likely contributed to a significant number of children being out of school (Bhatta et al. 2023; Frontier 2022; Insecurity Insight 2021).

Compounding these educational challenges, Myanmar's economy has been on a downward spiral since the military takeover in 2021, with the World Bank projecting a meager 1 percent growth by March 2024 (World Bank, 2024). The spread of conflict has led to

[1] The World Bank defines learning poverty rate as "the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a short passage of age-appropriate material—in other words, those who are below a 'minimum proficiency' threshold for reading" (Azevedo et al. 2021, 5).

displacement, disrupted trade routes, and increased transportation costs, leaving Myanmar's economy about 10 percent smaller than in 2019. Fiscal challenges persist, with a growing deficit financed largely by direct injections from the central bank, while households struggle with the lasting impacts of recent economic shocks, prompting increased migration. Consequently, near-term growth prospects have dimmed, with inflation expected to remain high at around 20% until March 2024.

Amidst these economic woes, expenditure within the education sector has experienced its most significant decline in almost a decade compared to the overall budget. In the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/2022, education received just 5.6 percent of the total public expenditure, hitting its lowest point since FY 2011/2012 (World Bank, 2022). Despite a slight recovery in the following FY 2022/23, rising inflation has meant that real expenditure on education has remained stagnant since FY 2017/18 (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, external contributions to the Ministry of Education (MoE) budget have nearly disappeared, plummeting by 86 percent in FY 2021/2022 following the suspension of foreign aid (World Bank, 2022). The lack of transparency in budget data from FY 2024/25 onwards makes it impossible to discern education finance trends and anticipate future conditions.

The declining investment in education has exacerbated the challenges faced by Myanmar's education system, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic and military takeover. Even after the pandemic had subsided, Myanmar continued to face a significant number of OOSC, in contrast to other countries in the region where enrollments largely returned to pre-pandemic levels.[2] According to official sources, the total school enrollment in Myanmar stood at approximately 4.8 million in November 2021 (SAC 2021), in stark contrast to the 9.7 million enrolled in 2019–2020. Subsequent revisions in May 2022 increased the estimate to 6.7 million, suggesting a return of some students. However, it is evident that a significant portion of school-age children, exceeding 30 percent, continue to face barriers to education in the aftermath of the military takeover.[3] Additionally, according to the Ministry of Information (MoI), as of May 2022, approximately 18 percent of public schools had still not reopened (MoI 2022).

The extended closures of schools, brought about by the combined impact of the pandemic and the escalating conflicts since 2021have significantly obstructed access to education and exacerbated the learning crisis in the country, which could have serious long-term socioeconomic consequences. According to simulations by the World Bank (Azevedo 2020), the average learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) for the current cohort of children are projected to decline by approximately two years. This indicates that, on average, children made no educational progress during the school closures triggered by the pandemic and the political instabilities. The learning loss that continues to accumulate, even now, due to the ongoing conflicts long after the pandemic has concluded, not only threatens progress in access and quality of education but is likely to have severe long-term socioeconomic consequences. The accrued

[2] According to World Bank (2022), evidence gathered from household surveys and/or administrative data in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand suggests minimal variations in enrollments between the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Similarly, administrative data from Bangladesh indicates that enrollment figures for preprimary to grade 5 remained largely unchanged during this time frame (DPE 2021).

[3] According to Bhatta et al. (2023), 28 percent of the 6–17-year-old children in the country are currently out of school.

learning deficit will affect human capital accumulation and lower future earnings. The reduction in LAYS just for the two-year period following the onset of the pandemic and February 2022 is estimated to lead to an 11 to 13 percent decrease in average annual earnings per student (Bhatta and Katwal 2022a). With a substantial number of children still out of school and no foreseeable resolution to the ongoing political conflict, the impact on future earnings is expected to be even more profound, increasing poverty and inequality and hampering overall economic growth (Schady et al. 2023).

Furthermore, Myanmar faces a looming threat to the long-term literacy and overall well-being of its population, with the projected learning poverty reaching 100 percent (Bhatta and Katwal 2022a). The potential decline in literacy levels is particularly alarming, posing profound adverse effects on the country's overall economic development and the health and well-being of both children and adults if children fail to acquire the basics of literacy, numeracy, and other foundational skills (World Bank et al. 2022b). The well-documented connection between literacy and positive developmental and health outcomes[4] underscores the critical importance of addressing the educational crisis for the future of Myanmar. As Myanmar grapples with the challenges of political unrest and a disrupted education system, the need for targeted interventions to reintegrate OOSC into the education system, ensure their sustained retention, and prevent further dropouts becomes increasingly urgent.

This report aims to offer a comprehensive assessment of the OOSC situation in Myanmar, filling a crucial knowledge gap in this area. The persistent presence of a significant number of school-age children being out of school underscores the urgency for a thorough examination of the OOSC scenario in the country. Particularly, there exists a noteworthy deficiency in understanding OOSC within the post-pandemic, post-coup context, and this study endeavors to bridge that knowledge void. The primary objectives of this analysis encompass examining the current state and trends of OOSC, both overall and across distinct age groups (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary); scrutinizing variations in OOSC rates across diverse child, household, and community attributes; identifying the factors influencing out-of-school status; shedding light on the current activities of OOSC, the challenges they face, their aspirations, and potential educational opportunities available to them.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the data and analytical methodology employed in this study. Section 3 delves into a comprehensive analysis of the OOSC profile in the country, encompassing the present status of OOSC, observed changes from pre-COVID to the current period, and variations in OOSC rates across diverse dimensions. Section 4 discusses some challenges and opportunities faced by OOSC. Lastly, Section 5 offers a summary of the study's findings and provides concluding remarks.

[4] Several studies have consistently emphasized the pivotal role literacy plays in fostering economic development and improving health outcomes (Bhargava 2008, Grosse and Auffrey 1989, Schell 2007).

2. Data and methodology

Sampling

The MSPS 2023-24 survey covered 303 out of 330 townships in Myanmar, representing about 95 percent of the country's population. It employed a stratified random sampling approach, using a frame of approximately 150,000 households from 321 townships. Within each township, households were divided into two groups based on the household head's education level, with a maximum of 32 households sampled per township. Given ongoing conflicts, MSPS continues to be conducted via phone, implementing measures to mitigate potential biases associated with this methodology. The survey design ensures representation of often overlooked groups and maintains comparability with other sub-nationally representative surveys. Some states like Shan and Rakhine were oversampled due to higher poverty rates, remoteness, and conflict intensity. This approach allows MSPS to track subnational well-being changes over time while ensuring compatibility with other high-quality surveys in Myanmar. Detailed sampling methodology is available in the technical documentation (Sinha Roy 2023; Sinha Roy, 2024).

Data sources

The analysis of out-of-school children (OOSC) in this study relies on household survey data from two sources: the Myanmar Subnational Phone Survey 2024 (MSPS 2024), and the Myanmar Living Conditions Survey 2017 (MLCS 2017). While most of the analysis is based on MSPS 2024, MLCS 2017 is utilized to illustrate trends in OOSC rates and compare 2017 rates with the present situation.

Both MSPS 2023 and 2024 are large-scale nationally and sub-nationally (state and region) representative phone-based household survey datasets, featuring a comprehensive set of education-related questions. The education modules in both surveys largely overlap in terms of their question sets. An important limitation of the MSPS data is that it only enquires about schooling status for children ages 5 to 25. This means the analysis of OOSC rate among the preschool-age children is restricted to only 5-year-old children as the data on the school enrollment of 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old children is not available.[5] The fieldwork for MSPS 2023 spanned from November 2022 to March 2023, while MSPS 2024 was conducted from November 2023 to March 2024.

The MLCS 2017 is a nationally representative survey, which was conducted face to face, and it also has comprehensive set of questions related to education access. In addition to these surveys, the study integrates conflict data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project and qualitative information obtained through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to enhance the understanding of the challenges surrounding access to education in the current political context of the country.

[5] The education levels and the corresponding age and grade groups are presented in Table A1 in the Annex.

The OOSC qualitative analysis work involved 103 OOSC from nine states and regions between the age of 6 and 21. The qualitative data collection included FGDs with 66 parents of OOSC and 31 KIIs with teachers to seek their insights of the OOSC situation in Myanmar. The number of FGDs and KIIs was not based on the nationally representative sampling, but it tried to maximize the availability and the reliability of the respondents for both phone and in-person interviews.

Analytical approach

The analysis employs simple descriptive statistics and regression methods to examine the current status and trends of OOSC. In this report, OOSC are defined as children ages 5 to 17 who have either never attended school or were previously enrolled but are currently out of school. This encompasses preprimary, primary, and secondary (lower and upper) age groups. However, due to data limitations, the analysis of OOSC among preschool children is restricted to 5-year-olds. The assessment encompasses an overview of the OOSC profile, changes in OOSC status from 2017 to 2023, and disparities in OOSC rates across various individual and household dimensions, including gender, disability status, socioeconomic status, language, and ethnicity. To augment the descriptive analysis, regression models provide robust insights into the determinants of out-of-school status among primary and secondary school-age children. Detailed information on the regression models is presented in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1: Regression models for the determinants of out-of-school status

A simple probit regression model is used to analyze the determinants of out-of-school status among the primary and secondary school-age children (ages 6–17). Preprimary school-age children (5-year-olds) are excluded from this analysis. The key outcome is out-of-school status of each individual child. So, the dependent variable is a binary variable which is 1 if the child is out of school and 0 if the child is enrolled in school in the current academic year. The outcome $Y_{i,h,t}$, for child i from household h residing in township a is modeled as follows:

$$Y_{i,h,a} = \beta_0 + \boldsymbol{X}_{i,h,a}\,\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \varepsilon_{i,h,a},$$

where $\boldsymbol{X}_{i,h,a}$ is a matrix of explanatory variables representing different student and household characteristics, and $\varepsilon_{i,h,a}$ is a random error term. The coefficient vector $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ represents the average effects of the various explanatory variables on the outcome while controlling for the effects of the other variables included in the model. To present the differential effect for different age groups, estimates for four distinct groups of children are presented: (a) primary and secondary school-age children (ages 6–17), (b) primary school-age children (ages 6–10), (c) lower secondary school-age children (ages 11–14), and (d) upper secondary school-age children (ages 15–17).

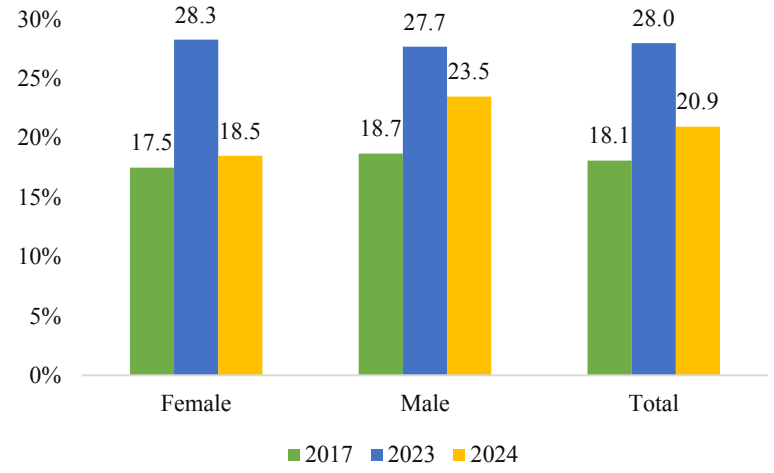
The wealth index utilized in this study is derived from the first principal components of a set of observable dwelling characteristics and ownership of consumer durables. These characteristics encompass housing quality, ownership of a motorized vehicle, refrigerator, television, wardrobe, rice cooker, digital device, and whether the dwelling is connected to the electrical grid.

3. Variations in OOSC rates across demographics and geographical locations

3.1 Overall state and trend of OOSC

According to MSPS 2022–2023 and MSPS 2023–2024 data, the proportion of OOSC seems to be declining. Following the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the military takeover, there was a notable surge in the percentage of children (ages 5–17) not enrolled in school. This figure rose significantly from 18 percent in 2017 to 28 percent in 2023, marking a substantial 10 percentage point increase (Figure 3.1). However, more recent data from the MSPS 2023–2024 indicates a positive shift, with the OOSC rate decreasing to about 21 percent. Despite this improvement, it is important to note that the current rate still exceeds the 18 percent observed in 2017. Furthermore, the decline in non-enrollment has been more pronounced for females, with a decrease of approximately 10 percentage points, compared to 4.2 percentage points for males.

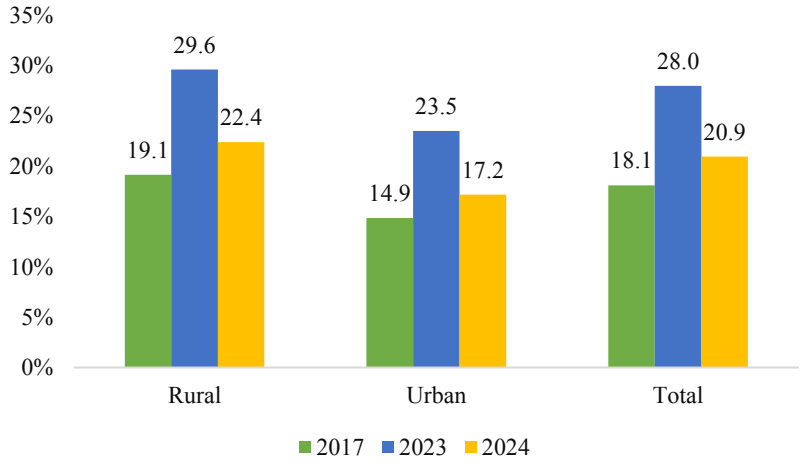
Figure 3.1: Share of children not enrolled in school by gender, 2017–2023



Source: Original figure based on MLCS (2017), MSPS (2023), and MSPS (2024).

Between 2023 and 2024, there was a noticeable decrease in the OOSC rate in both urban and rural areas, although rural regions still exhibit a higher proportion of OOSC. During this period, both urban and rural areas experienced similar reductions in the share of OOSC, with a decline of 7 percentage points in rural regions and 6 percentage points in urban regions (as depicted in Figure 3.2). As of 2024, 22 percent of rural children ages 5 to 17 are out of school, compared to 17 percent of their urban counterparts who are not enrolled in school.

Figure 3.2: Share of children not enrolled in school by location, 2017–2023

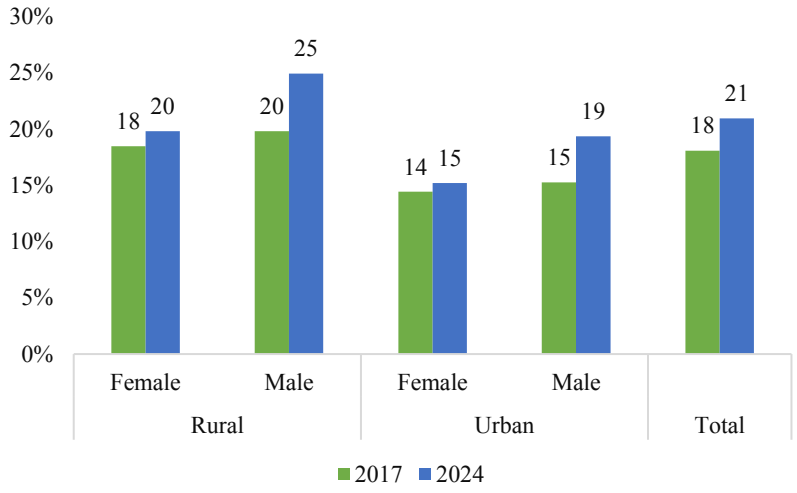


Source: Original figure based on MLCS (2017), MSPS (2023), and MSPS (2024).

The increase in the OOSC rate from 2017 to 2024 varies significantly across locations, with both urban and rural males experiencing the most substantial rise. Over this period, the percentage of urban males not enrolled increased by 27 percent (or 4 percentage points), while rural areas saw a similar increase of 26 percent (or 5 percentage points) (Figure 3.3). In contrast, females experienced much smaller increases, with urban females witnessing a 5 percent rise in the

OOSC rate and rural females experiencing a 7 percent increase. This widening gender gap in non-enrollment underscores the need for targeted interventions to ensure educational access and retention, particularly for male students in both urban and rural settings.

Figure 3.3: Share of children not enrolled in school by location and gender, 2017–2023



Source: Original figure based on MLCS (2017) and MSPS (2024).

The OOSC rate exhibits significant variation across different age groups, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. Among preprimary school-age children, particularly 5-year-olds,[6] more than one-third (37 percent) are not enrolled in school, marking a notable increase from 29 percent observed last year (see Figure A1 in annex). However, it is important to note that this is a conservative estimate, as it only considers 5-year-old children due to data limitations, and OOSC rates are expected to be even higher among 3- and 4-year-olds. Furthermore, a staggering 45 percent of adolescents ages 15 to 17 are currently out of school, emphasizing a considerable enrollment challenge in upper secondary education. Although this figure has decreased from the 51 percent recorded in 2023, it remains substantial. Conversely, the proportions of primary and lower secondary school-age children who are not enrolled in school have notably decreased since last year and currently stand at relatively small percentages of 6 and 16 percent, respectively.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of children in Myanmar are overage for their respective educational levels. The issue of overage children is prevalent at both primary and secondary levels. Alarmingly, nearly half (45 percent) of lower secondary school-age children (11–14 years) are still enrolled in primary school, with a striking 85 percent of 11-year-olds and 65 percent of 12-year-olds attending primary education (Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5). Furthermore, the proportion of lower secondary school-age children attending primary school almost doubled between 2023 and 2024, increasing from 27 percent to 45 percent, marking a troubling trend.

[6] As outlined in Section 2, this study focuses solely on the OOSC rate among 5-year-olds due to data limitations.

Similarly, over one-quarter (26 percent) of upper secondary school-age children find themselves enrolled in lower secondary (22 percent) or primary education (4 percent). This situation underscores a substantial issue in Myanmar where children are falling behind their expected grade levels and failing to attend age-appropriate classes. Some of this discrepancy can be attributed to long-standing challenges of grade repetition or delayed entry into the education system. However, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing political unrest in the country have exacerbated these challenges.

The enrollment in alternative forms of schooling, such as monastic schools, is comparatively limited. Specifically, less than 1 percent of students are enrolled in monastic schools. When broken down by age groups, 0.07 percent of primary school-age children, 0.32 percent of lower secondary school-age children, and approximately 0.08 percent of upper secondary school-age children attend monastic schools. These figures align with recent findings indicating an overall low enrollment in monastic schools and a declining trend in attendance over the past few decades (CSO, UNDP, and World Bank, 2020).

Case Study 1 provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers and students in the context of a monastic school in Myanmar. It underscores the need for a holistic approach to education that addresses not only academic aspects but also the socioeconomic and political factors that affect children's access to education. By creating safe learning environments, providing adequate resources and support for teachers, and offering alternative educational pathways, we can work toward ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach his/her full potential.

Case Study 1: Monastic schoolteacher

Daw Cho Cho, a monastic schoolteacher with a year of teaching experience, shares her insights and experiences in the field of education. Her decision to teach at the school is driven by a combination of personal and altruistic reasons. With her daughter attending the same school and a pressing need for teachers, Daw Cho Cho is passionate about guiding children in their learning and helping them stay on a positive life path.

The school faces a significant challenge in terms of teacher-student ratio, with only three teachers responsible for 87 students. Despite this limitation, Daw Cho Cho observes that the children value education and attend school regularly, except during times of instability in the area. The students demonstrate a commitment to their studies by following the rules and showing improvement in their learning. Daw Cho Cho goes above and beyond her regular teaching duties by dedicating extra time to assist children who struggle with their studies, ensuring that no child is left behind.

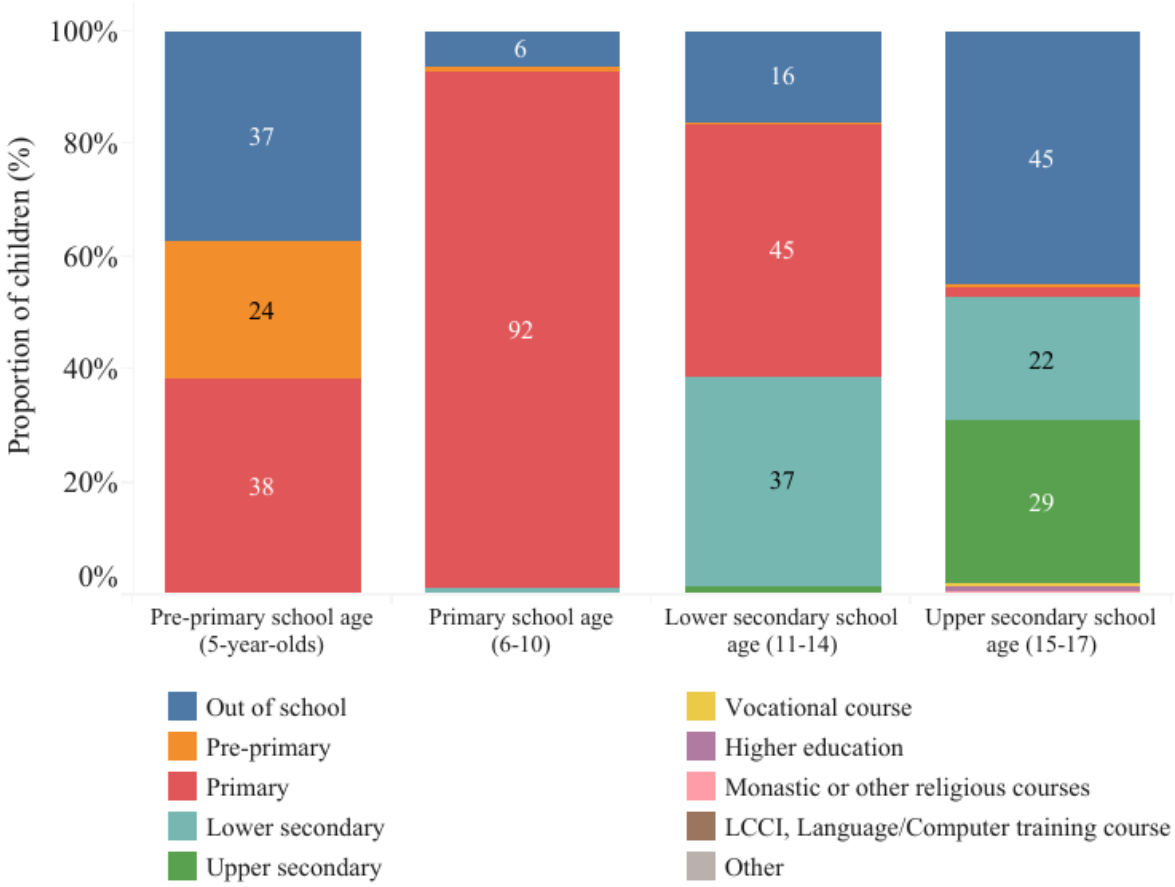
The transition rates from primary to middle school and from middle to high school are encouraging, with 75 percent of primary school students moving on to middle school and all middle school students attending high school. However, Daw Cho Cho notes that some students face barriers in pursuing higher education due to the unstable political situation and poor family economic conditions. These factors highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to education that addresses not only academic aspects but also the socioeconomic and political context in which the students live.

Daw Cho Cho emphasizes the importance of creating a safe environment for children to ensure their continued attendance in school. She observes that some parents hesitate to send their children to school due to concerns about political instability, underscoring the need for measures that promote safety and security in and around educational institutions.

When children do leave school, Daw Cho Cho notes that it is often to assist their parents in farming or to find work in the city. This highlights the economic pressures that many families face and the difficult choices they have to make between education and livelihood. Some children who leave school participate in training programs to improve their lives, indicating the potential for alternative educational pathways and skill development initiatives to support OOSC.

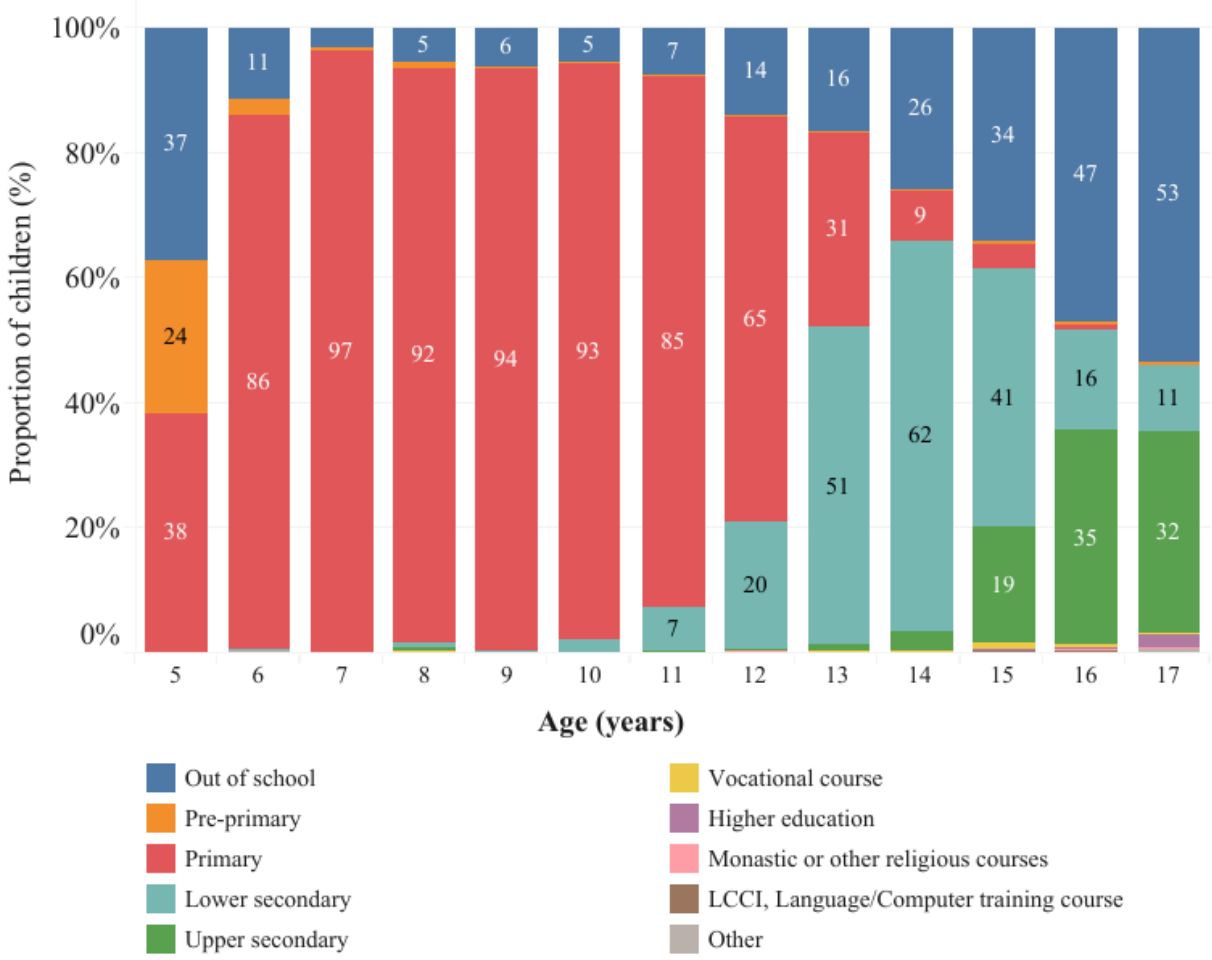
Source: KIIs conducted by World Bank (2023–2024).

Figure 3.4: Schooling status of children by age group (2024)



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).
Note: LCCI stands for London Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Figure 3.5: Schooling status of children by age (2024)



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).
Note: LCCI stands for London Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

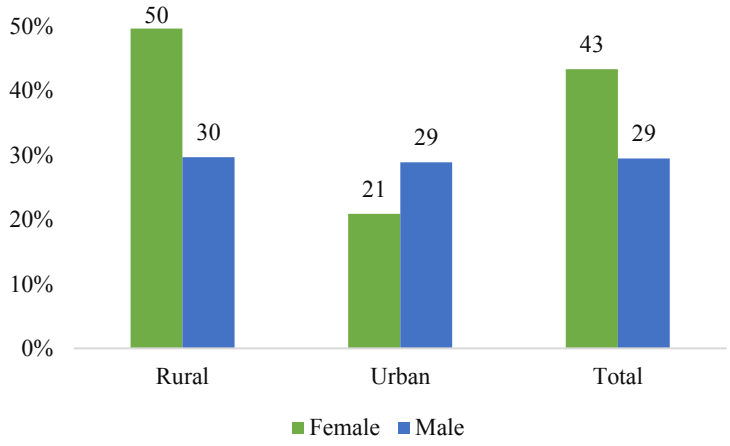
3.2 Preprimary school age (5-year-old children)

Effective early childhood education (ECE) programs can enhance educational outcomes through various channels. These programs play a crucial role in fostering the development of essential cognitive, behavioral, and social skills in children, thereby positively influencing their participation and achievements in primary school (Bhatta and Katwal 2022a). A substantial and continually expanding body of evidence from numerous countries underscores the significant advantages, especially for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (MoE, UNESCO, and UNICEF 2018; UNESCO 2010). Despite the potential gains that children from impoverished families stand to acquire from engaging in ECE initiatives, their participation remains consistently lower compared to their counterparts from more affluent households. There is also significant disparity in preschool enrollment across geographical locations.

Rural areas bear a significantly higher burden of OOSC, with an OOSC rate of 41 percent, compared to 25 percent in urban regions, marking a substantial urban-rural gap of 16

percentage points. This disparity is largely driven by the remarkably high OOSC rate among rural females, with 50 percent of 5-year-old girls out of school, contrasting with 30 percent of rural boys (Figure 3.6). In urban areas, the trend is reversed, with males exhibiting a higher out-of-school rate of 29 percent, compared to 21 percent for females.

Figure 3.6: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by location and gender



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

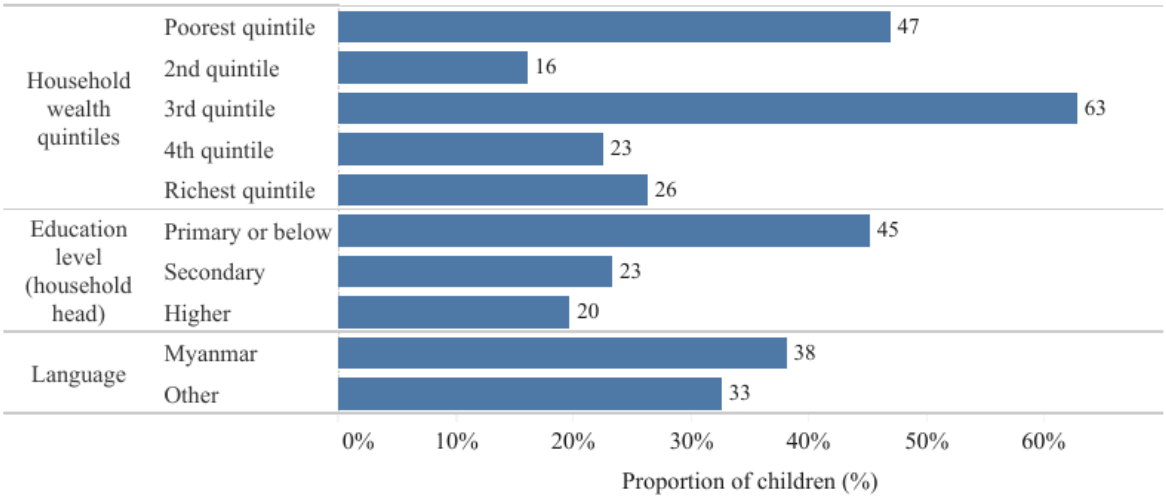
The relationship between preschool-age children being out of school and their households' socioeconomic status appears complex. However, there is a clear disparity between children from the poorest and wealthiest households, with a significant gap in their OOSC rates—47 percent for the poorest households compared to 26 percent for the wealthiest, representing a substantial 21 percentage points difference (Figure 3.7). In other words, children from the poorest households are twice as likely to be out of school as those from the richest households. Interestingly, there is no consistent trend across other wealth groups. Surprisingly, the middle-income group exhibits the highest OOSC rate, with 63 percent of children from these households currently not enrolled in school. Conversely, children in the second wealth quintile have the lowest OOSC rate, with only 16 percent of 5-year-olds out of school.

Furthermore, a strong correlation emerges between the educational attainment of the household head and the OOSC rate. Households led by individuals with primary education or below exhibit a significantly higher OOSC rate of 45 percent compared to those with heads having secondary or higher education, where the rates drop to 23 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Another noteworthy variation is observed across language groups, particularly between Myanmar or Myanmar language speaking households and those primarily speaking non-Myanmar languages.[7] In Myanmar language speaking households, the OOSC rate is somewhat higher, with 38 percent of children currently not enrolled in school compared to households predominantly speaking non-Myanmar languages, where the rate stands at 33 percent. It is worth noting that at the time of reporting, active conflict situations have been escalating in Bamar-speaking parts of

[7] The non-Myanmar languages include the following ethnic languages: Shan, Karen, Kachin, Chin, Mon, Kayah (also known as Kayah, Ka-yun, Yin Talai, or Yin Baw), Rakhine, Chinese, Hindi/Gorkha, Arabic, Bengali, Punjabi, or any other language not mentioned.

the country—Sagaing, Magway, and Bago regions—where typically fewer students dropped out of school compared to non-Myanmar-speaking areas. These findings highlight the multifaceted factors influencing OOSC rates, including economic status, education levels, and language, underscoring the need for targeted intervention strategies to improve access to education.

Figure 3.7: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by wealth group, household head's education level, and language



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

There are significant disparities in preprimary education access across various states and regions in Myanmar.[8] The percentage of OOSC at the preprimary level varies significantly from state to state, highlighting the uneven educational landscape in the country. Rakhine state stands out with the highest proportion of OOSC in preprimary education at an alarming 82 percent (Figure 3.8). This indicates that a vast majority of children in Rakhine are not receiving the foundational learning experiences that preprimary education provides. Sagaing follows closely with about 68 percent of children not enrolled in preprimary schools, while Kayin and Bago also show high percentages of OOSC at 57 and 50 percent, respectively.

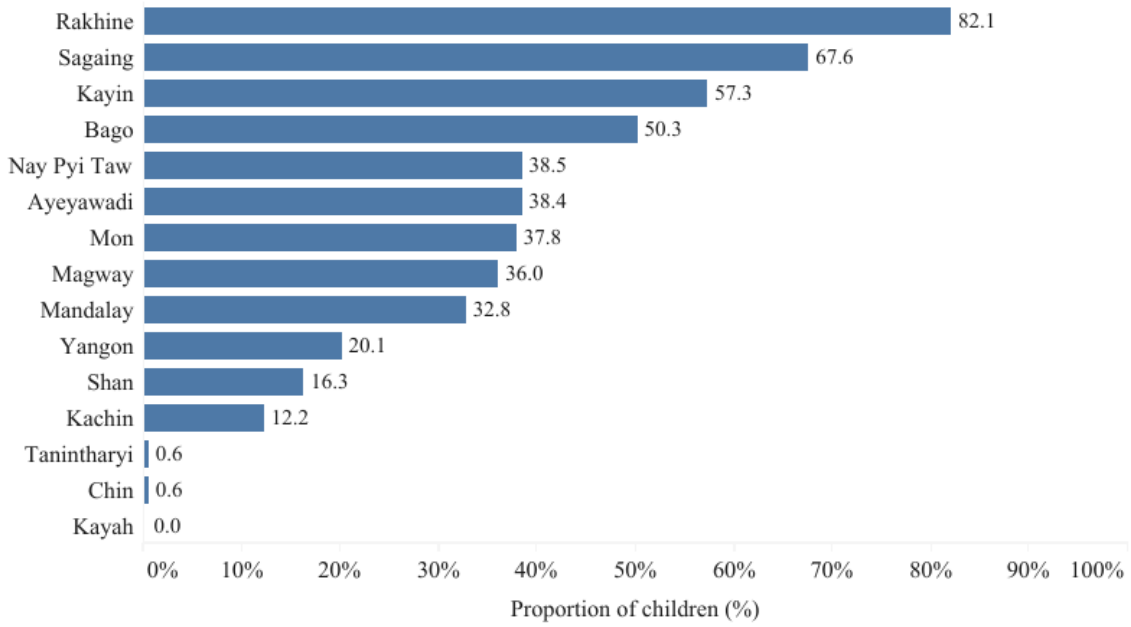
In contrast, some states showcase better preprimary education participation. Yangon, Shan, and Kachin have relatively lower OOSC rates. However, it is important to note that even in these states, a significant portion of children are still missing out on crucial early learning opportunities. Notably, Tanintharyi, Chin, and Kayah states exhibit very low (below 1 percent) OOSC rates at the preprimary level.

The data reveals a clear disparity in preprimary education access across Myanmar states. While some states have made significant strides in ensuring that children are enrolled in

[8] Myanmar is administratively divided into seven regions (Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, and Yangon), seven states (Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan), and the Union Territory of Nay Pyi Daw. Myanmar speakers make up over 90 percent of the population in each of the seven regions and Nay Pyi Daw. Conversely, the minority ethnic communities or national races, predominantly non-Myanmar speakers, are concentrated in the seven states.

preprimary schools, others, particularly Rakhine and Sagaing, face critical challenges in providing access to early education.

Figure 3.8: Share of preschool-age children (5-year-olds) not enrolled in school by state or region

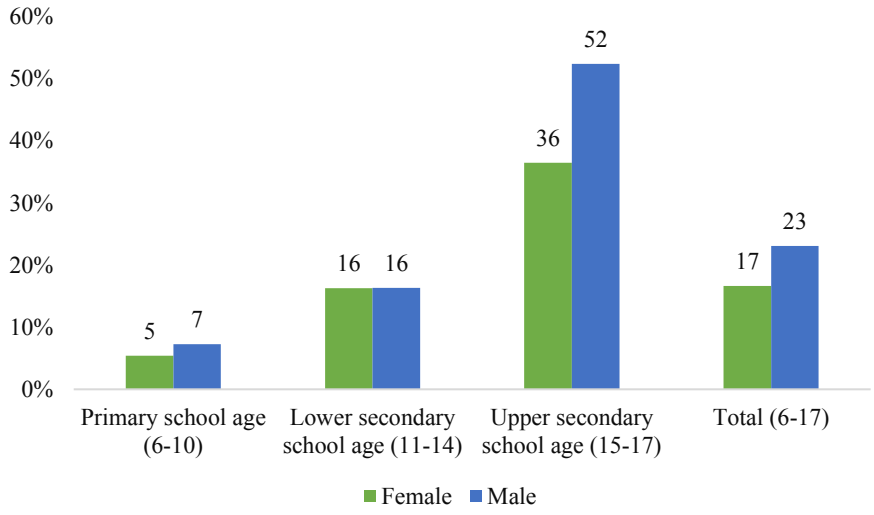


Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

3.3 Primary and secondary

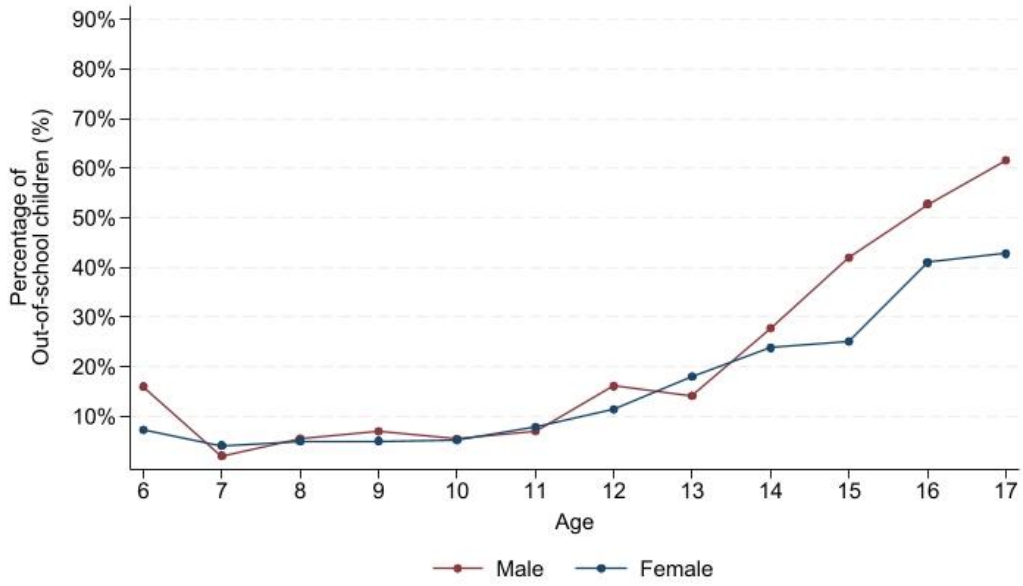
Overall, male primary and secondary school-age children have a higher OOSC rate than females. The OOSC rate among males is 23 percent, compared to 17 percent for females, representing a 6 percentage point difference (Figure 3.9). However, upon closer examination by age groups, distinct patterns emerge. Notably, the OOSC rate is only marginally higher among males in the primary school-age group, with 7 percent of males out of school compared to 5 percent of females. This aligns with the prior trend where females exhibited a higher enrollment rate or lower OOSC rate than males at the primary school-age group (Bhatta and Katwal 2022b). At the lower secondary school-age level, virtually no difference is observed between genders; both males and females have an OOSC rate of 16 percent in this age group. However, at the upper secondary level, the disparity is significant, with males experiencing a 16 percentage point higher OOSC rate than females. Notably, more than half (52 percent) of males in this group are out of school, compared to 36 percent of females. Further disaggregation of the age group confirms this finding and exhibits the largest gender gap occurring among 15-, 16-, and 17-year-old children (Figure 3.10). In qualitative findings, 97 percent of the OOSC respondents indicated that being a girl or birth order among siblings had no significant influence on discontinued schooling.

Figure 3.9: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by age group and gender



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Figure 3.10: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by age and gender

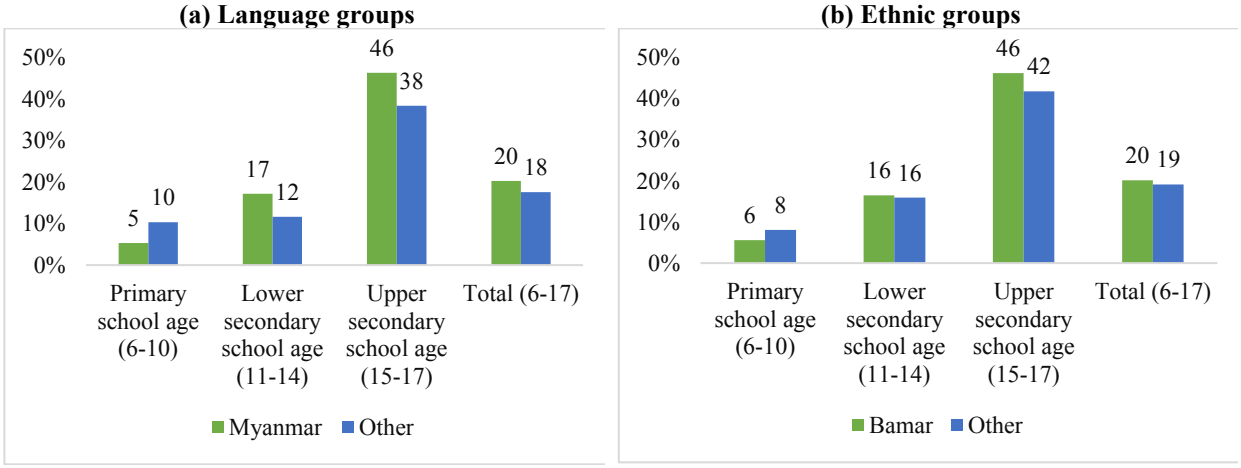


Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

There exists a minimal discrepancy in the prevalence of OOSC between majority and minority language and ethnic groups. Overall, Myanmar-speaking children demonstrate a higher out-of-school rate, with 20 percent compared to 18 percent among non-Myanmar speakers (Figure 3.11). In contrast to the overall trend, at the primary school level, non-Myanmar speakers exhibit a higher out-of-school rate than Myanmar speakers, at 10 percent and 5 percent,

respectively. However, this trend reverses at the lower and upper secondary levels, where Myanmar-speaking children show higher rates. In lower secondary, 17 percent of Myanmar speakers are out of school compared to 12 percent of non-Myanmar speakers, resulting in a 5 percentage point gap. Likewise, at the upper secondary level, the out-of-school rate is 46 percent for Myanmar speakers and 38 percent for non-Myanmar speakers, illustrating an 8 percentage point disparity. A similar pattern emerges when considering the gap in out-of-school rates between the Bamar population and other ethnic groups, although the differences are comparatively smaller than those observed across language groups.

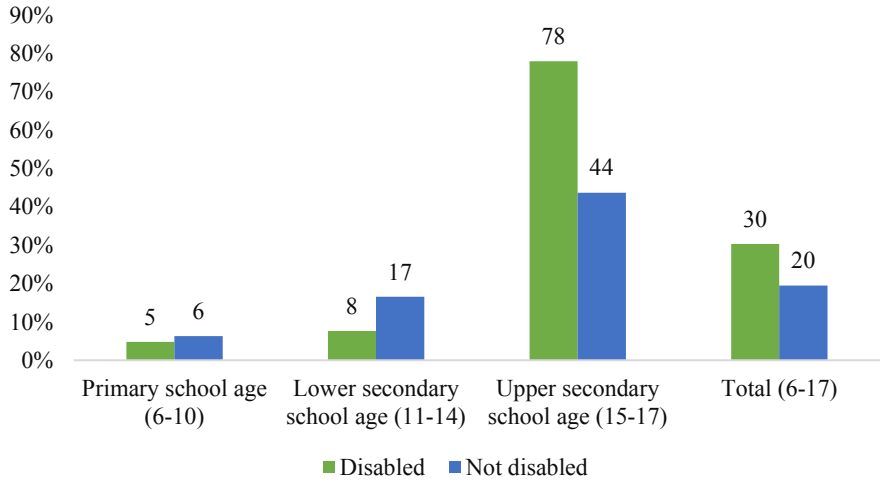
Figure 3.11: Share of primary and secondary OOSC across language and ethnic groups



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

A significantly larger proportion of disabled adolescents are out of school compared to their nondisabled counterparts. Overall, when considering the entire age range from 6- to 17-years old, the out-of-school rate is substantially higher among disabled children, standing at 30 percent compared to 20 percent among nondisabled children (Figure 3.12). Surprisingly, however, the OOSC rates are lower among disabled children at the primary and lower secondary school-age level. This trend reverses in the upper secondary school-age group (15–17 years) and the disparity becomes even more pronounced, with a staggering 78 percent of disabled children out of school compared to 44 percent of nondisabled children, underscoring a significant educational challenge faced by disabled adolescents.

Figure 3.12: Share of primary and secondary OOSC by disability status

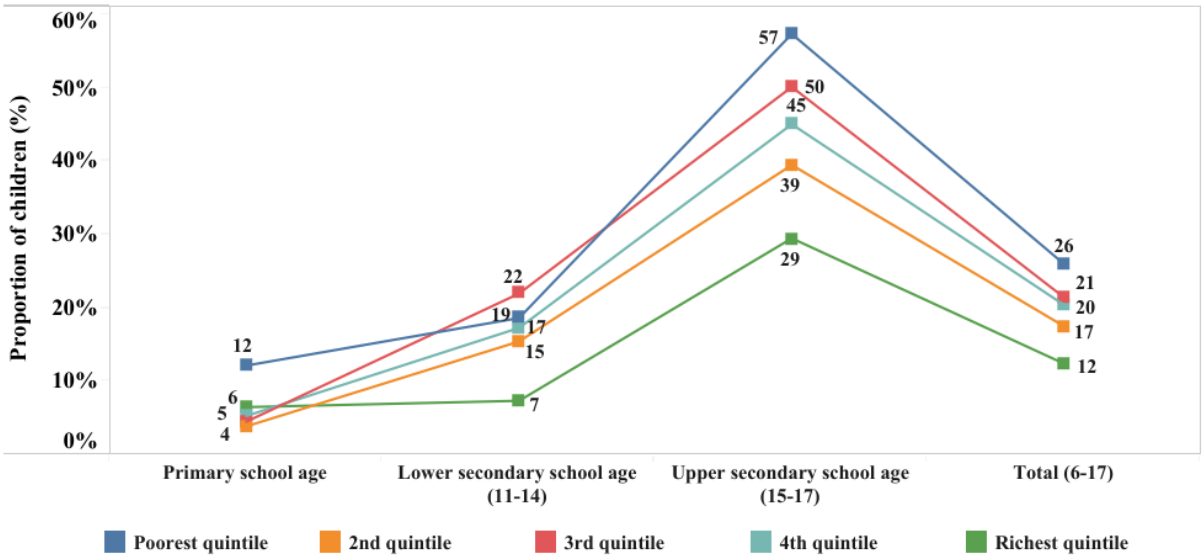


Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

The OOSC rates among primary and secondary school-age children demonstrate significant variability across income brackets. Notably, overall, there exists a substantial disparity of 14 percentage points between children in the top and bottom wealth quintiles (Figure 3.13). Specifically, while 26 percent of children (ages 6–17) from the bottom wealth quintile are not enrolled in school, only 12 percent from the top wealth quintile share the same circumstance. This discrepancy persists across all education levels, with gaps of 6, 11, and 28 percentage points at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels, respectively.

However, distinct correlations between OOSC rates and wealth emerge across different age groups. At the primary school level, children from the poorest households have the highest OOSC rate at 12 percent. In contrast, the rest of the wealth quintiles have relatively lower rates ranging from 4 to 6 percent, with minimal differences among them. Conversely, at the lower secondary level, the trend shifts. Despite children from the wealthiest households showing the lowest rate, those from middle-income households (third wealth quintile) experience the largest share of children out of school, at 22 percent—3 percentage points higher than the rate for children from the poorest households. Similarly, children in the third wealth quintile have a relatively high rate, with half of them being out of school at the upper secondary level. Nonetheless, this rate remains lower than that observed among the poorest children, which stands at 57 percent.

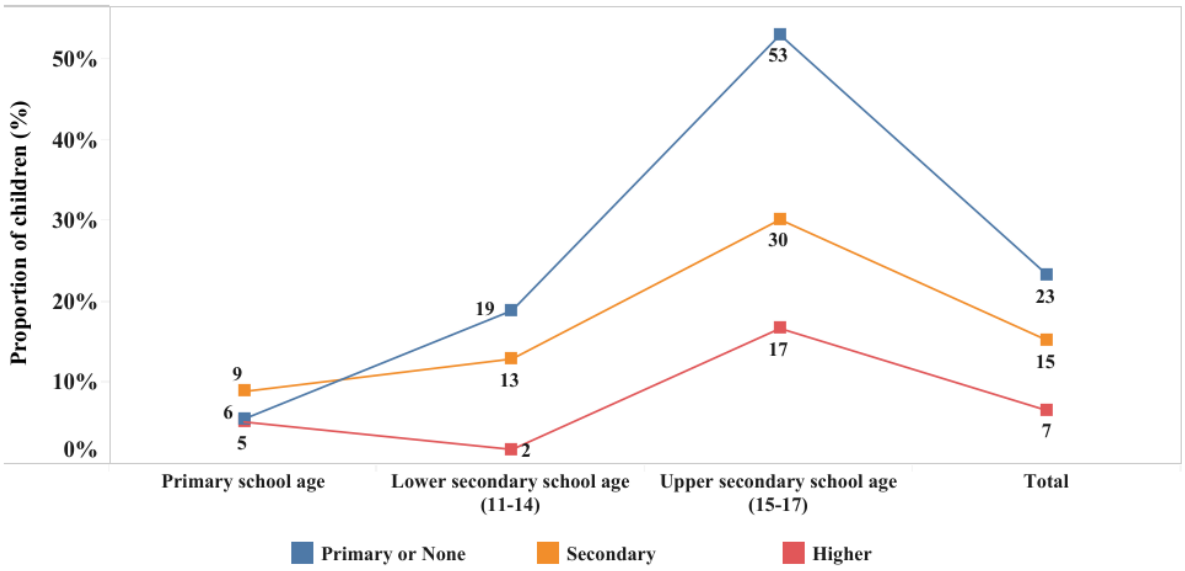
Figure 3.13: Percentage of children out of school, by age group and wealth group



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

A discernible pattern emerges, indicating a higher proportion of children not enrolled in school among households where heads possess lower levels of education, with the most significant disparity observed at the upper secondary school-age level. Figure 3.14 illustrates this trend, with 23 percent of children (ages 6 to 17) from households where heads have a primary or lower level of education are out of school, in contrast to 15 percent and 7 percent of children from households where heads have secondary and higher education, respectively. This discrepancy persists across the lower and upper secondary school-age levels, where children from households with a head having primary or lower education exhibit OOSC rates approximately 17 and 36 percentage points higher, respectively, compared to children from households with heads holding tertiary education. However, the relationship between out-of-school status and household head's education level is less clear among the primary school-age group. Surprisingly, the OOSC rate among children from households where heads have secondary education is higher than the rate for children from households where heads have primary or lower levels of education.

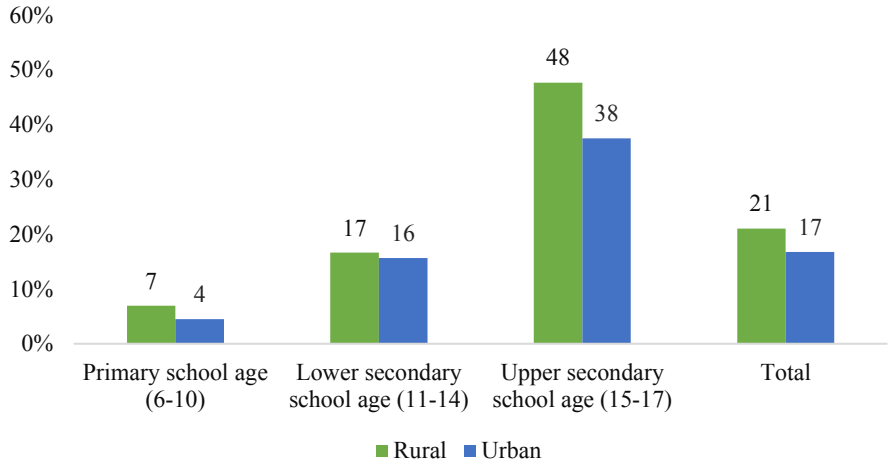
Figure 3.14: OOSC rate by household head's education level



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

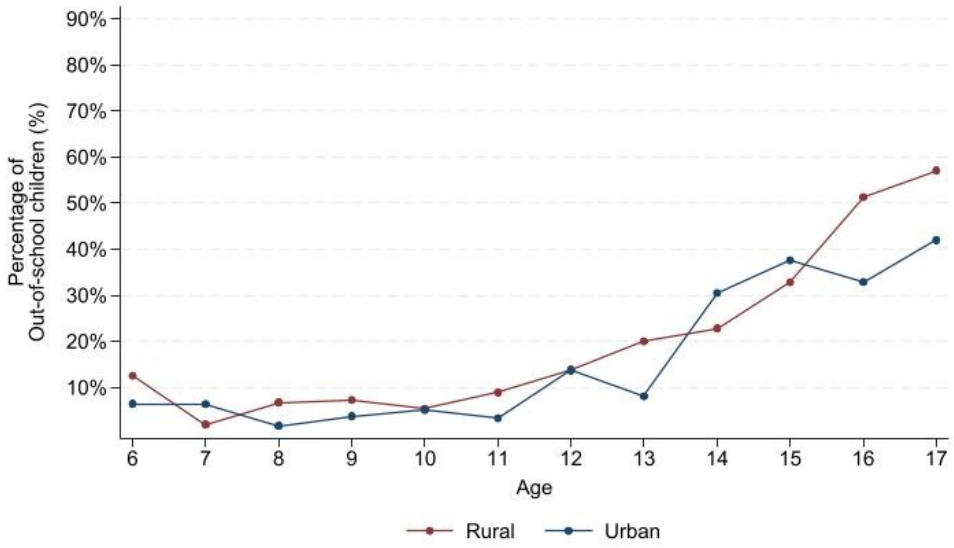
There is a noteworthy variation in the proportion of children out of school between urban and rural areas. Overall, the urban-rural gap in the out-of-school (OOSC) rate among 6 to 17-year-olds is 7 percentage points in favor of urban children (Figure 3.15). Although the share of OOSC in rural areas exceeds that in urban areas at all age levels, the disparity is particularly pronounced at the primary and upper secondary school-age level. The OOSC rate in rural areas surpasses that in urban areas at primary and lower secondary levels by 3 and 1 percentage points, respectively, while the gap at the upper secondary school-age level widens to 10 percentage points. Figure 3.16 shows that the urban-rural gap is particularly large among the 16- and 17-year-old children. This pattern of better access to education in urban areas compared to rural areas aligns with prior observations of access in earlier years. Previous research indicates a convergence in access to primary and secondary education across urban and rural areas in recent years, implying a declining urban-rural gap. However, this trend appears to be driven by a larger decline in access in urban areas relative to rural areas (Bhatta et al. 2023; Bhatta and Katwal 2022b).

Figure 3.15: OOSC rate by location (rural and urban)



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Figure 3.16: OOSC rate by location (rural and urban) and age



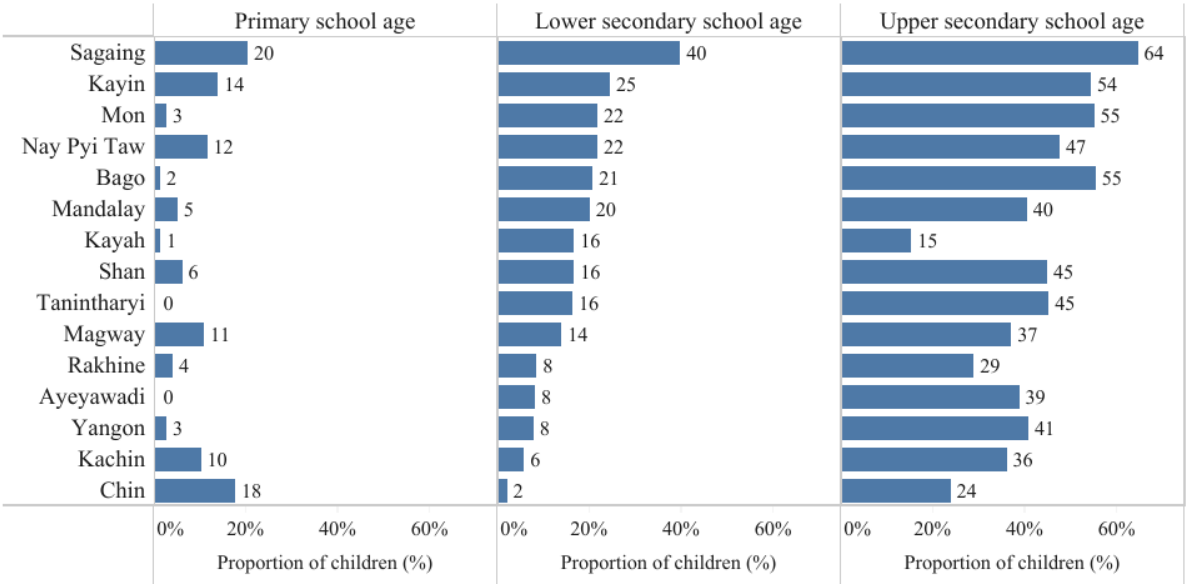
Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

The MSPS 2024 data offers valuable insights into the OOSC rates across different states and regions in Myanmar, focusing on primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school-age groups. The analysis reveals significant disparities in educational access and participation among children of varying age groups and geographical locations. At the primary school level, Sagaing region stands out with the highest OOSC rate of 20 percent, indicating that one in five children of primary school age in Sagaing is not enrolled in school. Chin and Kayin states also show concerning figures, with 18 percent and 14 percent of primary school-age children out of school, respectively. In contrast, states such as Ayeyarwady and Tanintharyi have almost no children out of school at the primary level.

Moving to the lower secondary school-age group, Sagaing region again exhibits the highest OOSC rate at 40 percent, suggesting that a significant portion of children in this age group are not continuing their education beyond primary level. Kayin and Mon states also show high OOSC rates for lower secondary school age, at 25 percent and 22 percent, respectively. Notably, Chin state, which had a high OOSC rate at the primary level, shows a relatively low OOSC rate of 2 percent for the lower secondary age group.

The upper secondary school-age group presents the most alarming figures across all states and regions. Sagaing region continues to have the highest OOSC rate at 64 percent, indicating that nearly two-thirds of children in this age group are not enrolled in school. Bago, Mon, and Kayin also show high OOSC rates for upper secondary school age, at 55, 55, and 54 percent, respectively. Even in regions with lower OOSC rates at the primary and lower secondary levels, such as Yangon and Mandalay, the OOSC rates for upper secondary school age remain high at 41 percent and 40 percent, respectively. It is worth noting that the consistently high OOSC rates, across different age groups, observed in Sagaing and Kayin regions align with the high internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these regions[9]. On the other hand, some of the other states, such as Kayah, Chin, and Rakhine, that have large number of IDPs have relatively small OOSC rates.[10]

Figure 3.17: OOSC rate by state and region



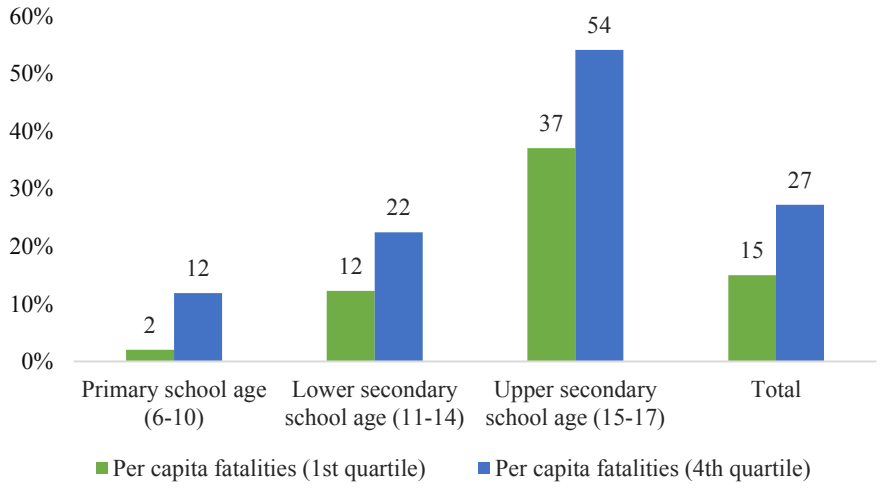
Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

OOSC rates are significantly higher in high-conflict areas compared to low-conflict areas, particularly among younger age groups. In high-conflict areas, the OOSC rate at the primary level is 10 percentage points or over five times that in low-conflict areas (Figure 3.18). And notably, only 2 percent of primary school-age children are out of school in low-conflict areas. Similarly, at the lower secondary level the OOSC rate in high-conflict areas 80 percent higher than in low-conflict areas. While the gap in OOSC rates between high-conflict and low-conflict areas

[9] See Annex Figures A2 and A3for recent statistics on displaced populations.
[10] Annex Table A2 provides the number of IDPs by state and region in Myanmar.

is comparatively smaller at the upper secondary school-age group, it remains substantial, with a 46 percent difference favoring low-conflict areas. These disparities emphasize the pressing need for implementing policies and interventions that guarantee every child's access to education, regardless of the security conditions in his/her regions.

Figure 3.18: OOSC rate by conflict intensity across townships



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

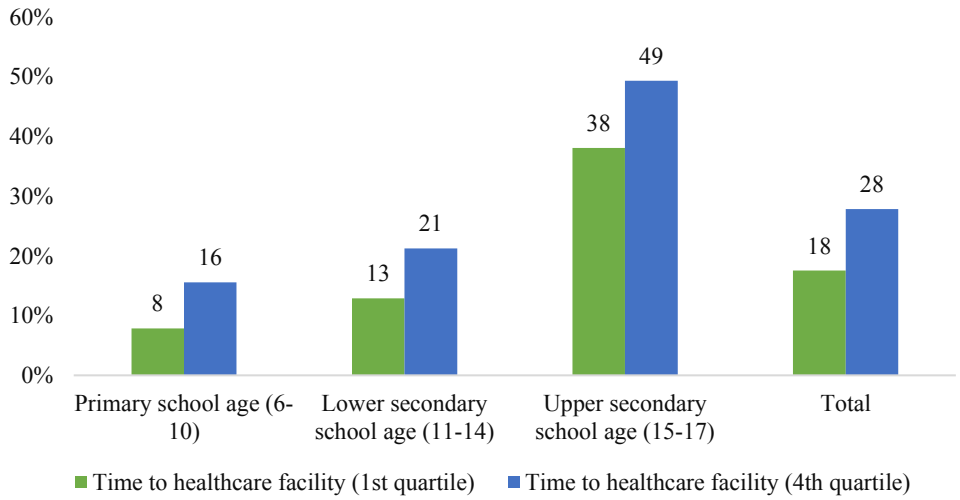
The MSPS 2022–2023 reveals a clear correlation between the proximity of households to schools and out-of-school (OOSC) rates.[11] The data shows that children from households located closer to schools have significantly lower OOSC rates compared to those from households farther away. At the primary school-age level, children from households in the bottom quartile of travel time to the nearest primary school have an OOSC rate of 12 percent, while those from households in the top quartile have a rate of 21 percent, reflecting a 9-percentage point difference. Similarly, at the lower and upper secondary school-age levels, the corresponding gaps are 7 and 15 percentage points, respectively. These findings are further supported by qualitative data from KIIs, where a significant share of OOSC respondents indicate that schools are far from their homes.

Recognizing the impact of geographical proximity on educational access, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has implemented a policy that allows for the establishment of a high school or a branch high school within a 4-mile radius to improve access to high school level education for communities within that distance. In an effort to further increase the number of high schools and high school branches, the MoE planned to reduce the distance to a 2-mile radius. However, the implementation of this plan was not completed due to supply-side issues related to the deployment of high school teachers to new schools. Despite these challenges, the MoE's policy highlights the importance of considering travel distance when addressing barriers to enrollment and the need for a comprehensive approach that includes both infrastructure development and human resource allocation to ensure equitable access to education for all children in Myanmar.

[11] The MSPS 2024 does not include questions on proximity to the nearest school. Therefore, the information provided in this analysis is based on data from the MSPS 2023.

Proximity to health care facilities demonstrates an inverse relationship with the prevalence of OOSC. Across all age groups combined, the overall out-of-school rate is markedly higher in areas with lengthier travel times to health care facilities, with 28 percent of children in the fourth quartile compared to 18 percent in the first quartile (Figure 3.19). Delving deeper into specific age brackets, a consistent pattern emerges. Among primary school-age children (6–10 years), those in locales with lengthier journeys to health care centers exhibit a higher out-of-school rate, standing at 16 percent in the fourth quartile compared to 8 percent in the first quartile. Similarly, within the lower secondary school-age group (11–14 years), a noticeable gap exists, with 21 percent of children in the fourth quartile out of school versus 13 percent in the first quartile. This divide persists into the upper secondary school-age group (15–17 years), where a striking 49 percent of adolescents in the fourth quartile are out of school, in contrast to 38 percent in the first quartile.

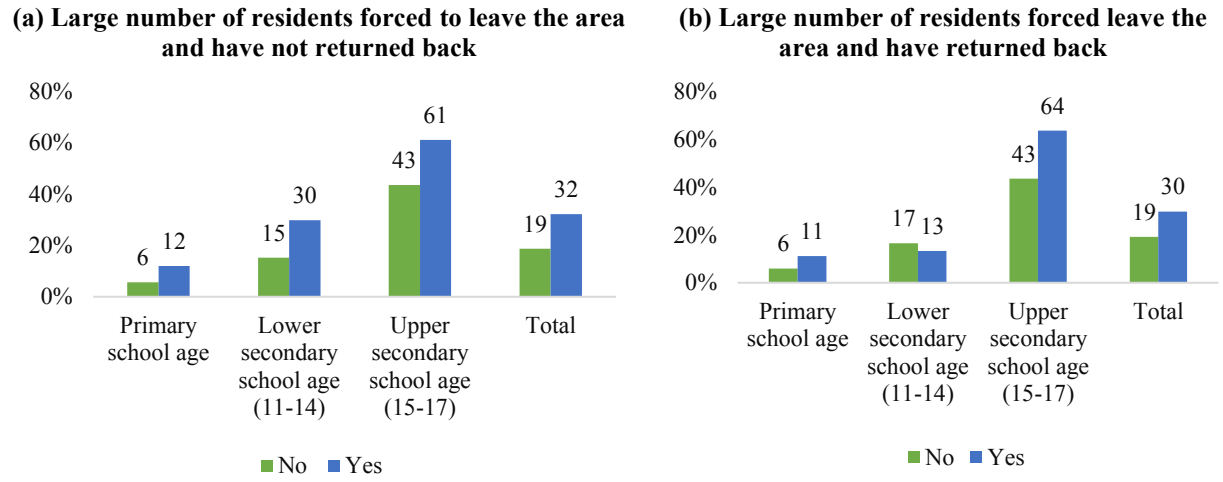
Figure 3.19: OOSC rate by time taken to reach the nearest health care facility



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Areas experiencing significant outflux of residents tend to have higher rates of OOSC. In the MSPS 2023–2024 survey, respondents were asked about large-scale departures of residents from their village tract or ward, with many not yet returning. The prevalence of OOSC was notably elevated among participants residing in areas with substantial outflux of residents. Specifically, at the primary and lower secondary school levels, the proportion of OOSC was twice as high in areas experiencing significant outflux compared to those unaffected (see Figure 3.20a). This trend persisted, albeit to a lesser extent, at the upper secondary level, where areas with substantial outflux exhibited over a 40 percent larger share of OOSC. A similar pattern was observed in areas where residents who had previously left returned.

Figure 3.20: OOSC rate by large outflux of residents



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

4. Challenges and opportunities in education access

This section delves into the foundational characteristics of OOSC and the principal obstacles hindering education, drawing insights from the MSPS datasets. Augmenting the profile analysis, probit regression models are employed to discern the determinants of out-of-school status. Furthermore, it investigates prominent barriers to education, elucidating key factors contributing to children being out of school. Consistent with the previous chapter, the analysis is disaggregated by primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary age groups. Additionally, it delves into the employment status of non-enrolled children, focusing specifically on upper secondary school age (15–17 years). Finally, this section delves into potential areas of opportunity, providing valuable insights into the educational aspirations and goals of the children.

The MSPS dataset is also used to highlight the perception regarding universal access to education and ways to improve access to education. In tandem with quantitative MSPS analysis, qualitative data gleaned from FGDs with parents and OOSC, alongside KIIs with parents and teachers, enriches the understanding of access barriers, student retention, transitional challenges, and perceptions of educational opportunities.

4.1 Basic profile of OOSC and determinants of out-of-school status

A noticeable disparity exists between OOSC and school-enrolled children, revealing distinct patterns across various demographic indicators. Table 4.1 illustrates that a significant proportion of OOSC, 59 percent, are of high school age, contrasting sharply with the 18 percent of in-school children. The qualitative data from the KIIs also suggests that the majority of interviewed children who dropped out of school were enrolled in high schools or high school branches, followed by those in middle or post-primary schools, and lastly, those in primary schools. Moreover, 47 percent of OOSC come from the poorest two quintiles, in contrast to 42 percent of their enrolled counterparts. Additionally, OOSC predominantly reside in rural areas, constituting 77 percent of the total, compared to 71 percent among in-school children.

Furthermore, children from high-conflict townships are significantly more likely to be out of school, with 30 percent of OOSC originating from townships characterized by the highest levels of conflict, in contrast to 20 percent from those with the lowest per capita conflict incidents.

The gender distribution of OOSC reveals a significant imbalance. Notably, males account for 58 percent of OOSC, while females constitute 42 percent. This striking disparity contrasts with the nearly equal distribution of males and females among in-school children and the overall child population. The gender imbalance becomes particularly pronounced at the upper secondary age group, where a staggering 63 percent of OOSC are males and only 37 percent are females. While the disproportion is less severe at the primary school age, males still comprise a larger share at 55 percent, compared to 45 percent for females. These disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions and policies to address the underlying factors contributing to the disproportionate exclusion of certain gender groups from education at various levels, thereby promoting equitable access and opportunities for all children, regardless of their gender.

A higher percentage of OOSC in all three age groups come from the poorest households (bottom wealth quintile). Among the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school-age children, 37 percent, 30 percent, and 26 percent, correspondingly, come from the poorest families. Interestingly, among primary school-age OOSC, a significantly larger proportion originate from relatively wealthy households—33 percent from the top two wealth quintiles—compared to their older counterparts, where the figures range from 28 to 29 percent.

While a disproportionately larger share of OOSC come from high-conflict townships in all age groups, this is most noticeable among primary school-age children and to a lesser extent among lower secondary school-age children. Specifically, 38 percent of primary school-age OOSC come from townships with the highest levels of conflict (top 25 percent in terms of per capita conflict incidents). The corresponding figures for lower secondary school-age children are lower at 33 percent and lower still for upper secondary school-age children at 27 percent. Notably, only 8 percent of primary school-age OOSC come from townships in the bottom quartile of conflict incidents, while the corresponding figure for lower secondary school-age children is 20 percent. Notably, the distribution of upper secondary school-age children across the conflict intensity quartiles is relatively balanced.

Table 4.1: Profiles of OOSC (6–17-year-old), 2023 (%)

	OOSC				Children who are in school	All children
	Primary school age	Lower secondary school age	Upper secondary school age	All		
Gender						
Male	55	49	63	58	48	50
Female	45	51	37	42	52	50
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
Age group						

	OOSC					
	Primary school age	**Lower secondary school age**	**Upper secondary school age**	**All**	**Children who are in school**	**All children**
Primary school age (6–10)	100			13	46	40
Lower secondary school age (11–14)		100		28	36	34
Upper secondary school age (15–17)			100	59	18	26
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
Consumption quintile						
Poorest quintile	37	30	26	28	20	22
2nd quintile	13	21	20	19	22	22
3rd quintile	18	22	25	23	21	22
4th quintile	15	20	19	19	18	18
Richest quintile	18	8	10	10	18	16
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
Location						
Rural	81	70	79	77	71	72
Urban	19	30	21	23	29	28
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
Conflict/non-conflict						
Bottom quartile	8	20	22	20	29	27
2nd quartile	13	19	27	23	28	27
3rd quartile	40	29	24	27	23	23
Top quartile	38	33	27	30	21	22
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Source: Original calculations based on MSPS (2024).

The probit regression analysis sheds light on the intricate interplay between a child's out-of-school status and various individual, household, and community factors in Myanmar. The findings corroborate and expand upon the insights gleaned from the earlier profile analysis, highlighting substantial correlations with age, language, socioeconomic status, and geographical location.

Interestingly, while older children generally exhibit a higher likelihood of being out of school, this trend reverses for primary school-age children, where age demonstrates a negative association with out-of-school status. Moreover, speaking the Myanmar language shows a statistically significant positive association, particularly at the upper secondary level, indicating a robust link. Specifically, being a Myanmar speaker elevates the likelihood of being out of school among upper secondary school-age children by 20 percent compared to non-Myanmar speakers (Table 4.2). However, language does not appear to be a significant factor for primary and lower secondary school-age children being out of school.

Several socioeconomic and household factors exhibit negative associations with out-of-school status. Gender emerges as a significant factor, with females being about 5 percent less likely to be out of school overall and the most substantial effect observed in upper secondary school-age children, where they are about 14 percent less likely to be out of school compared to males. Being an ethnic majority, particularly belonging to the Bamar group, reduces the probability of being out of school, but only among the lower secondary age group. Household wealth demonstrates a significant negative association with out-of-school status, with the largest effect observed in upper secondary school-age children. Among the oldest group of children, those from the wealthiest households are 33 percent less likely to be out of school than those from the poorest households. The household head's education level also plays a pivotal role, correlating negatively with out-of-school status most prominently among upper secondary school-age children, with each additional year of schooling reducing the probability of being out of school by about 3 percent. Notably, being from a female-headed household reduces the likelihood of being out of school, but only among lower secondary school-age children.

Furthermore, residing in high-conflict areas or areas with extended travel time to the nearest health care facility is generally associated with heightened out-of-school status. Exposure to conflict is positively associated with being out of school among primary and upper secondary school age children while distance to health center is positively associated with out of school status among lower secondary school age children. These community-level challenges can pose significant barriers to accessing education, particularly for vulnerable populations residing in remote or conflict-affected regions.

Table 4.2: Determinants of schooling status (being out of school) among 6–17-year-old children

	Model 1 All (6–17)	Model 2 Primary age (6–10)	Model 3 Lower secondary age (11–14)	Model 3 Upper secondary age (15–17)
Child characteristics				
Child is female	−0.0529***	−0.0093	−0.0114	−0.1414***
	(0.0186)	(0.0146)	(0.0263)	(0.0453)
Age of child	0.0388***	−0.0129**	0.0489***	0.0773***
	(0.0029)	(0.0058)	(0.0126)	(0.0257)
Primary language at home is Myanmar	0.0181	−0.0546	0.0477	0.2030**
	(0.0362)	(0.0427)	(0.0448)	(0.0836)
Ethnicity - Bamar	−0.0364	−0.0137	−0.0826**	−0.0545
	(0.0292)	(0.0285)	(0.0405)	(0.0782)
Child is disabled	0.0158	−0.0630	−0.0694	0.2320
	(0.0571)	(0.0474)	(0.0970)	(0.1457)
Household socioeconomic and demographic characteristics				
Wealth quintile (reference: Bottom quintile)				
2nd wealth quintile	−0.1320***	−0.0973***	−0.0910**	−0.2140***
	(0.0295)	(0.0346)	(0.0407)	(0.0727)
3rd wealth quintile	−0.0872**	−0.0884**	−0.0251	−0.1706**
	(0.0340)	(0.0375)	(0.0566)	(0.0714)
4th wealth quintile	−0.0796**	−0.0841**	−0.0587	−0.1197*

	Model 1 All (6–17)	Model 2 Primary age (6–10)	Model 3 Lower secondary age (11–14)	Model 3 Upper secondary age (15–17)
	(0.0320)	(0.0356)	(0.0479)	(0.0718)
Top wealth quintile	−0.1541***	−0.0765**	−0.1532***	−0.3285***
	(0.0329)	(0.0386)	(0.0424)	(0.0700)
Is a female-headed household	−0.0165	−0.0094	−0.0843**	0.0660
	(0.0236)	(0.0204)	(0.0368)	(0.0566)
Household head's years of education	−0.0090***	0.0010	−0.0082**	−0.0293***
	(0.0024)	(0.0017)	(0.0036)	(0.0059)
Number of children in household	0.0052	−0.0053	0.0103	0.0268
	(0.0075)	(0.0085)	(0.0108)	(0.0174)
Location				
Urban	−0.0120	−0.0139	0.0197	−0.0328
	(0.0262)	(0.0165)	(0.0399)	(0.0551)
High-conflict area	0.0246**	0.0212***	0.0138	0.0408*
	(0.0097)	(0.0065)	(0.0139)	(0.0234)
Travelling time to the nearest health care facility	0.0170*	0.0122	0.0223*	0.0138
	(0.0093)	(0.0079)	(0.0124)	(0.0211)
Large outflux of residents who have not returned	0.0446	0.0053	0.0049	0.0824
	(0.0336)	(0.0242)	(0.0630)	(0.0752)
Number of observations	5,454	2,254	1,904	1,296
Pseudo R-squared	0.23	0.24	0.17	0.19

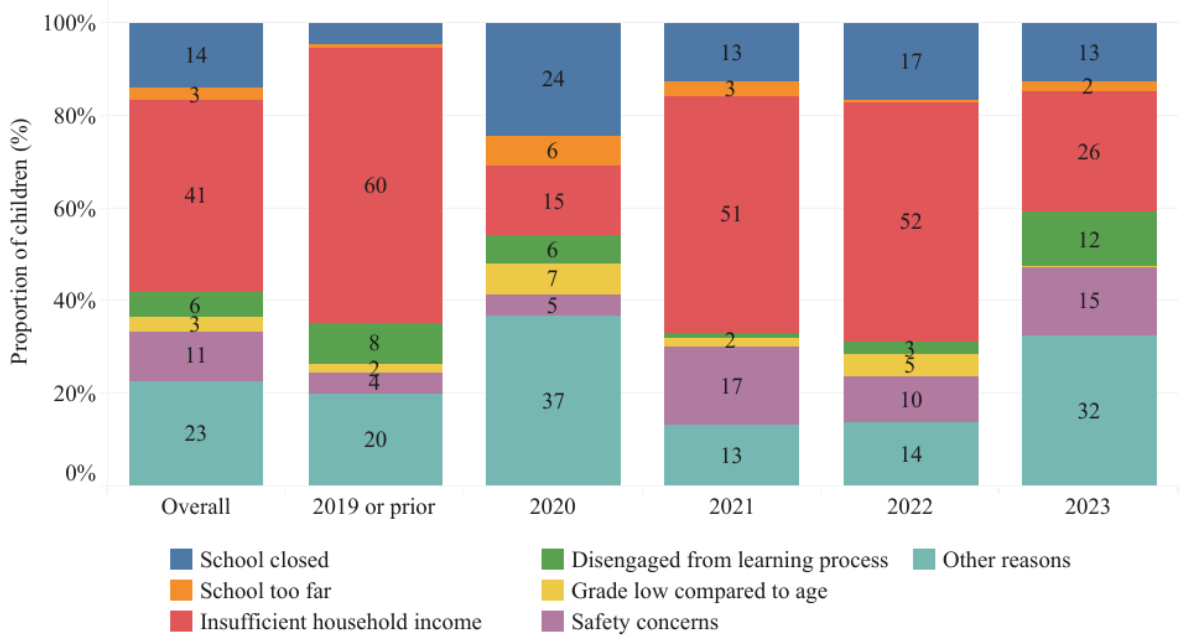
Source: Original calculations based on MSPS (2024).
Note: Robust standard errors presented in parentheses. Regression model used is probit (reported results are marginal effects); sample restricted to 6–17-year-old children; dependent variable is schooling status (1 if out of school and 0 otherwise); coefficients represent marginal effects; standard errors in parentheses.
a. Conflict intensity is measured as the log of per capita conflict incidents at the township level
***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.

4.2 Barriers to access

In assessing the factors contributing to school dropout in Myanmar, it is evident that poverty remains a significant obstacle to education. However, recent developments in the post-pandemic and post-coup context have introduced new dynamics to this landscape. Historically, insufficient family income has been the primary reason for discontinuing education, with 60 percent of children who last enrolled in school before 2019 attributing their dropout to financial constraints (Figure 4.1). Yet, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a notable shift. Among students who withdrew during 2020, a significant proportion cited school closures amid the pandemic as the primary reason for their dropout. Even among those who discontinued their education in 2021 or 2022, insufficient household income remained the predominant factor driving dropout rates. The KIIs further highlight that financial constraints are a major barrier to education, not only for the OOSC but also for their siblings. This underscores the significant role that economic hardship plays in the decision to leave school and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to alleviate the financial burden on families, enabling children to continue their education.

However, recent years have witnessed the emergence of interesting and potentially concerning patterns in school dropout trends. Compared to previous years, a significantly larger share of respondents are now citing safety concerns and disengagement from the learning process as key factors leading to dropout. Among students who dropped out between 2021 and 2023, the proportion citing safety concerns ranged from 10 to 17 percent. Moreover, there has been a sharp uptick in reports of disengagement from the learning process as a reason for dropout. While only 3 percent of children who dropped out in 2022 cited this reason, the figure increased to 12 percent among those who dropped out in 2023.

Figure 4.1: Reasons for dropping out of school across the years (6–17-year-old children)



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

The decision to leave school is a complex one, often involving both the students and their parents. According to the KIIs, a significant proportion of OOSC made the decision to leave school themselves, while in some cases, parents played a key role in this decision-making process. Despite the circumstances that led to their dropout, a majority of the OOSC expressed a desire to continue their education, indicating a strong value placed on schooling.

Leaving school is not an easy choice, and the emotional impact on the OOSC is evident. The KIIs reveal that a substantial proportion of OOSC felt unhappy about leaving their schools, suggesting a sense of loss and disappointment. This emotional burden highlights the importance of providing support and understanding to these children during this challenging transition.

Teachers play a crucial role in the lives of students, and their involvement in the school-leaving process is noteworthy. The KIIs indicate that a significant majority of OOSC discussed their decision to leave school with their teachers, demonstrating the trust and rapport between students and educators. Teachers' efforts to persuade students to continue their education and

maintain contact with them even after they have left school underscore the commitment of educators to their students' well-being and future prospects.

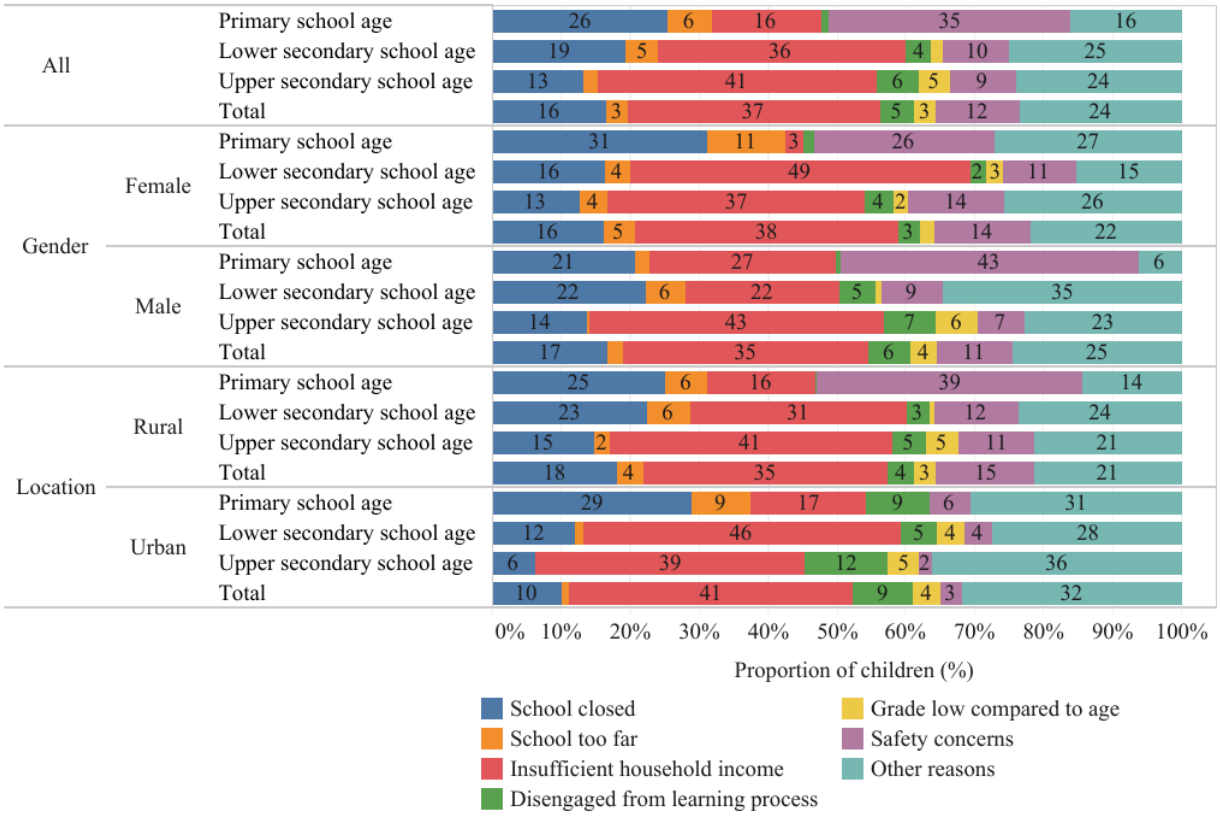
The engagement of teachers and schools extends beyond the students themselves, as the KIIs reveal that a considerable proportion of OOSC parents were contacted by teachers and schools to discuss their children's access to education. This proactive approach by educators and school administrators highlights the importance of parental involvement and the need for a collaborative effort in addressing the challenges faced by OOSC.

The factors contributing to school dropout exhibit significant variations across age groups, gender, and geographical locations, shedding light on the diverse challenges faced by children in accessing and staying in school. The reasons for dropping out of school vary markedly across different age groups. School closures emerge as a prominent factor, particularly among primary and lower secondary school-age children, with 26 percent and 19 percent citing this reason, respectively (Figure 4.2). In contrast, among upper secondary school-age children, school closure accounts for only 13 percent of dropout cases. Notably, as children progress to higher levels of education, poverty becomes a more prevalent reason for dropout, with 36 percent and 41 percent of lower and upper secondary school-age children attributing their dropout to financial constraints, compared to just 16 percent among primary school-age children.

Gender disparities also manifest in the reasons for dropping out of school. Among male primary school-age children, financial constraints are a significant factor, with 27 percent reporting dropout due to economic hardship. In stark contrast, only 3 percent of female primary school-age children cite financial reasons for leaving school. This discrepancy underscores the gendered nature of economic barriers to education.

Distinct patterns in dropout reasons are evident between rural and urban settings. While economic hardship remains a prevalent reason in both settings, a somewhat larger share of urban children (41 percent) cite financial constraints compared to rural children (35 percent). However, safety concerns emerge as a significant factor among rural children, with 15 percent attributing dropout to safety issues, compared to just 3 percent in urban areas. This rural-urban divide in safety concerns is particularly pronounced among primary school-age children, where 39 percent of rural children dropped out due to safety concerns, contrasting with only 6 percent in urban areas.

Figure 4.2: Reasons for dropping out of school by age group and gender and location, 2023



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).
Note: The results are derived from an analysis focused on children who discontinued their education in 2019 or later.

4.3 Current status of the OOSC—What are the OOSC doing now?

Participating in labor market has been a long-standing barrier to education in Myanmar, one that is intricately tied to poverty. A significant share of children dropped out of school to work, even before the pandemic. According to MLCS 2017, the primary reason reported for school dropout was poverty, with 38 percent of children leaving school due to their families' inability to afford education while 25 percent of children dropped out of school to work.[12] Importantly, it should be noted that poverty and child labor are deeply intertwined, and poverty often serves as the primary catalyst for children engaging in labor activities.

The ongoing social, economic, and political crisis in Myanmar has likely forced more children out of school, pushing them into the labor market and exacerbating the child labor situation. Children who find themselves excluded from the educational system due to safety and security concerns arising from political conflict and violence are increasingly likely to become

[12] According to ILO, all children below 18 years of age who are engaged in any activity to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for their own use are considered to be working children. (ILO 2018, 2023). This includes own-use production work, employment work, unpaid trainee work and volunteer work by children as well as other work activities by children, such as unpaid community services and unpaid work by prisoners.

involved in various forms of work, such as casual labor or serving as paid or unpaid household workers. At the same time, the combination of diminishing household income and the escalating cost of living has likely driven a growing number of children into the workforce. A pertinent illustration of this trend is evident in recent findings, which indicate a noteworthy surge in the utilization of family labor, including OOSC, particularly in the agricultural sector due to the increased cost of agricultural inputs (Sinha Roy, Demarchi, and Rhoads 2023).

The qualitative findings from the KIIs shed further light on the strong interlink between OOSC and child labor. A significant proportion of OOSC respondents confirmed that they need to work to support their families, highlighting the economic pressures that often drive children out of school and into the workforce. The nature of work undertaken by OOSC varies, with some engaging in household work, home farming, and fisheries that do not generate extra income. These children contribute to their family's livelihood without receiving any monetary compensation. About 21 percent of the interviewed OOSC are on unpaid family work. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of OOSC (37 percent of respondents) work as casual laborers, and a bigger share of OOSC respondents (63 percent) are on regular paid work, earning wages in various sectors such as construction, agriculture, and industry. The majority (41 percent) of working OOSC are paid MMK 5,000 per working day and 22 percent get paid MMK 6,000. The lowest paid among OOSC (10 percent) get MMK 3,000–3,500, another 10 percent get MMK 8,000–10,000, and the highest paid among the respondents (only 2 percent) get MMK 12,000.

Furthermore, many children endure strenuous and unsafe working conditions that compromise their health and safety. The Myanmar Labor Force Survey 2015 reveals that over half of the 1 million plus children, ages 5 to 17, engaged in some form of child labor are toiling in hazardous environments, posing substantial risks to their overall well-being (MoLIP and ILO 2016).

The KIIs reveal that informal networks and family connections play a crucial role in helping OOSC secure outside jobs. This reliance on informal channels may limit the opportunities available to these children and potentially expose them to exploitative working conditions. The parents of working OOSC provide insights into the daily wages earned by their children. While a significant proportion of OOSC earn a modest daily wage, there are instances where some children earn higher amounts. However, it is concerning to note that a portion of OOSC receive wages below the minimum wage threshold, highlighting the vulnerability of these children to underpayment and potential exploitation.

Case Study 2 highlights the complex interplay of economic pressures, family circumstances, and the lack of social safety nets that can force children out of school and into labor. It underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that can help children, like Melody (Case Study 2), stay in school and pursue their education without compromising their health, well-being, or future prospects.

Case Study 2: OOSC participating in labor market

Melody, a young girl from a family of four sisters, shares her story of struggle and determination. Her parents, both fishermen, face the challenge of irregular household income, which has a significant impact on the family's ability to support their children's education.

At the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year, Melody and her sister were enrolled in school, with Melody in grade 8 and her sister in grade 5. However, in an effort to contribute to the family's earnings, Melody took up work as a handloom worker in another village during the previous year's school holidays. As a newcomer to the handloom business, Melody's daily wage was a mere MMK 2,500, barely enough to cover her meals, let alone save money. In a desperate attempt to save, Melody resorted to eating guavas from the trees at her worksite and relying on snacks for sustenance.

Tragically, Melody's health suffered as a result of her inadequate diet, leading to her hospitalization due to severe stomach pain. To cover the hospital expenses, Melody had to borrow MMK 200,000 from her employer as an advance payment on her wages, further entangling her in a cycle of debt and work.

When the school reopened in June, Melody yearned to return to her studies, but the burden of her debt to her employer kept her trapped in the handloom business. It was not until October, after four months of missed lessons, that Melody was finally able to pay off her debt. However, upon attempting to re-enroll in school, she was informed by the principal that it was too late, as she had missed a significant portion of the academic year.

Despite the setbacks and challenges, Melody remains determined to secure her education for the next two years. She is prepared to make sacrifices and work hard to ensure that she can attend school and eventually pursue higher education at the university level. Melody's story is a testament to the resilience and perseverance of OOSC who, despite facing immense obstacles, refuse to give up on their dreams of education and a better future.

Source: KIIs conducted by the World Bank (2023–2024).

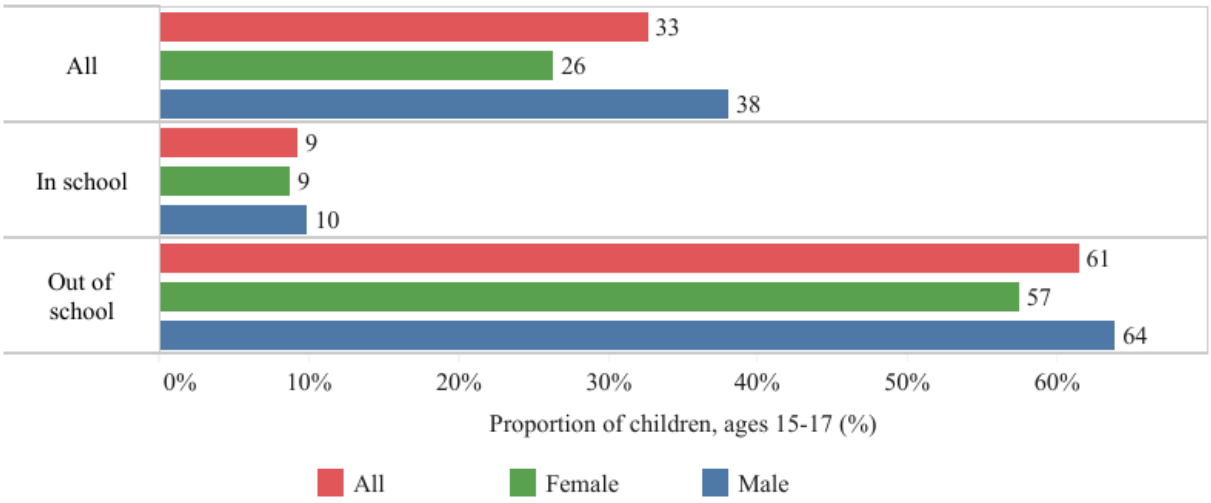
OOSC in Myanmar are disproportionately more likely to be engaged in the labor force compared to their counterparts enrolled in school. While data limitations prevent an accurate estimation of the precise shares of all 5 to 17-year-olds involved in the labor market, the available data on upper secondary school-age children (15 to 17 years) provides a concerning glimpse into this issue. Alarmingly, one-third of this age group is employed in the labor force.

OOSC exhibit a significantly higher employment rate, with a staggering 61 percent engaged in work, as opposed to only 9 percent of their school-enrolled peers (Figure 4.3). This stark disparity underscores the intricate link between access to education and labor market participation, necessitating a holistic approach that addresses both issues simultaneously.

Gender and location emerge as critical factors influencing employment participation among children in Myanmar. A pronounced gender disparity is evident, with males exhibiting significantly higher employment rates compared to females. Notably, 38 percent of males are involved in work, in contrast to only 26 percent of females. While this gender gap is not observed among enrolled students, it persists among the OOSC population. Male OOSC have an 11 percent higher employment rate than their female counterparts, with a staggering 64 percent of male OOSC and 57 percent of female OOSC engaged in work.

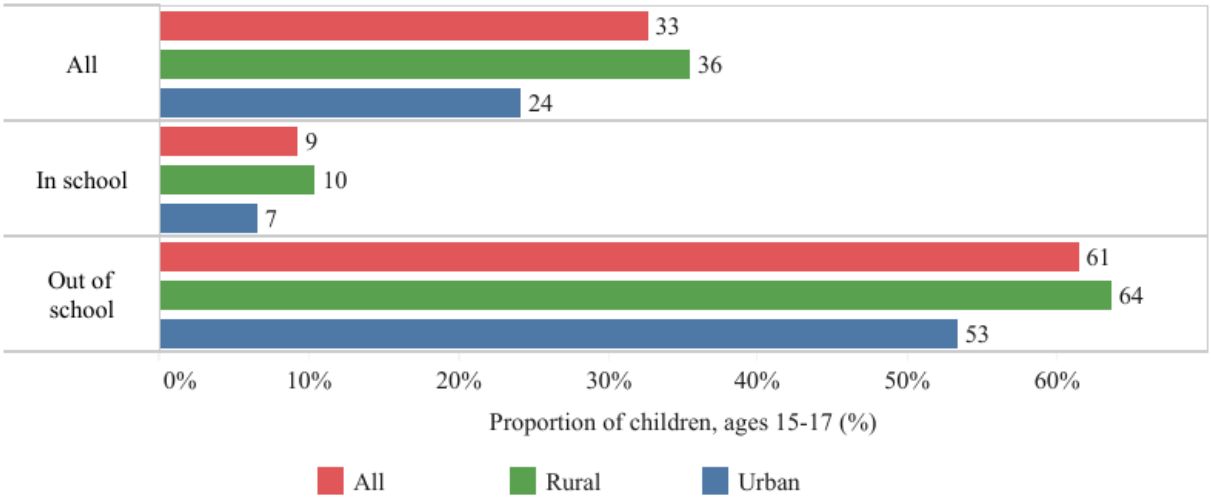
Geography also plays a pivotal role in shaping child employment patterns. Rural children have a larger participation in employment compared to their urban counterparts, with 36 percent of rural children engaged in work, as opposed to 24 percent of urban children (Figure 4.4). This disparity is further amplified among the OOSC population, where 64 percent of rural OOSC are employed, significantly higher than the 53 percent of urban OOSC engaged in work.

Figure 4.3: Share of upper secondary school-age children who are employed by enrollment status and gender



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Figure 4.4: Share of upper secondary school-age children who are employed by enrollment status and location



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Case Study 3 highlights the challenges faced by a village school in promoting education amid economic hardships and the allure of migrant work. Despite the efforts of the dedicated headteacher, many students drop out of school to seek employment opportunities abroad, prioritizing financial gain over education. This trend has led to a significant shift in the village's demographics, with mainly the elderly and young children remaining, while the potential of educated individuals remains untapped due to unproductive pursuits. The case study underscores the need for a holistic approach to address the root causes of school dropouts and migration, taking into account the living conditions and prevailing mindsets that hinder educational progress.

Case Study 3: Dreams Lost—School Dropouts and Migration in Pann Hla Village

Daw Aye Aye leads a Pann Hla village's primary school in Shan state, where she has been a head for three years. The school has only one teacher for 12 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. The parents in the village are not very interested in education. They mainly trade mushrooms, honey, and herbs. People from different ethnic groups live here.

When Daw Aye Aye came to the school, she had trouble with the language because the children spoke Shan, not Myanmar language. So, she taught extra classes even on weekends and holidays. Now, the children speak Myanmar language fluently and come to school regularly. But many students stop coming to school once they reach middle or high school to work in Thailand.

In this region, people think making money is more important than education. Low-income families often cannot afford to send their children to school. Some kids leave school even if they are good at studying because they see others who went to Thailand owning houses and cars. Some teachers only teach kids who can pay, which makes others feel bad and stop going to school.

Kids who leave school feel sad. Even though there are some educated people in the village, they only play online games and spend their time wastefully. Daw Aye Aye tries to help, but she cannot do much if living conditions are not good. There are programs for kids who dropped out, but many end up working in Thailand. Now, only old people and children are left in the village.

There are striking disparities in the employment rates between in-school and out-of-school children, with the magnitude of these disparities varying significantly across states. When examining the employment rates of in-school children, the data shows relatively low figures across most states. Kachin and Rakhine stand out with the highest employment rates among in-school children at 29 percent and 23 percent, respectively (Table 4.3). This suggests that even while attending school, a significant portion of children in these states are engaged in some form of employment. In contrast, states such as Chin, Shan, and Nay Pyi Taw have low employment rates among in-school children.

However, the employment rates among OOSC paint a starkly different picture. Chin state has an alarming employment rate of nearly 100 percent among OOSC, indicating that almost all children who are not in school are engaged in some form of work. Other states such as Mon, Kayah, and Sagaing also show high employment rates among OOSC, ranging from 76 percent to 86 percent. This highlights the vulnerability of OOSC and the limited opportunities they may have for education and overall well-being.

Comparing the overall employment rates across states, which include both in-school and out-of-school children, reveals further disparities. Sagaing and Mon states have the highest overall employment rates at 51 percent and 49 percent, respectively. This suggests that a significant

portion of school-age children in these states are engaged in employment, regardless of their schooling status. In contrast, states such as Tanintharyi and Kayin have relatively low overall employment rates at 10 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

The data underscores the urgent need for interventions that address the challenges faced by OOSC and provide them with opportunities for education and personal development. The high employment rates among OOSC across most states indicate that these children are likely engaged in work out of necessity, possibly due to poverty, lack of access to education, or limited support systems.

Table 4.3: Share of upper secondary school-age children (ages 15–17) employed by schooling status and state/region

State	All	In school	Out of school
Ayeyawadi	34.07	8.94	75.73
Bago	43.52	6.23	74.55
Chin	23.80	0.01	99.62
Kachin	40.26	28.59	61.03
Kayah	14.76	2.30	83.70
Kayin	10.55	16.63	5.44
Magway	25.55	7.66	55.95
Mandalay	35.87	12.44	70.18
Mon	48.70	3.56	85.80
Nay Pyi Taw	23.43	1.78	47.55
Rakhine	21.31	22.87	17.94
Sagaing	50.65	4.64	76.19
Shan	22.37	1.34	48.67
Tanintharyi	9.89	13.12	6.01
Yangon	30.93	5.92	67.68

Source: Original calculations based on MSPS (2024).

4.4 Potential opportunities and aspirations

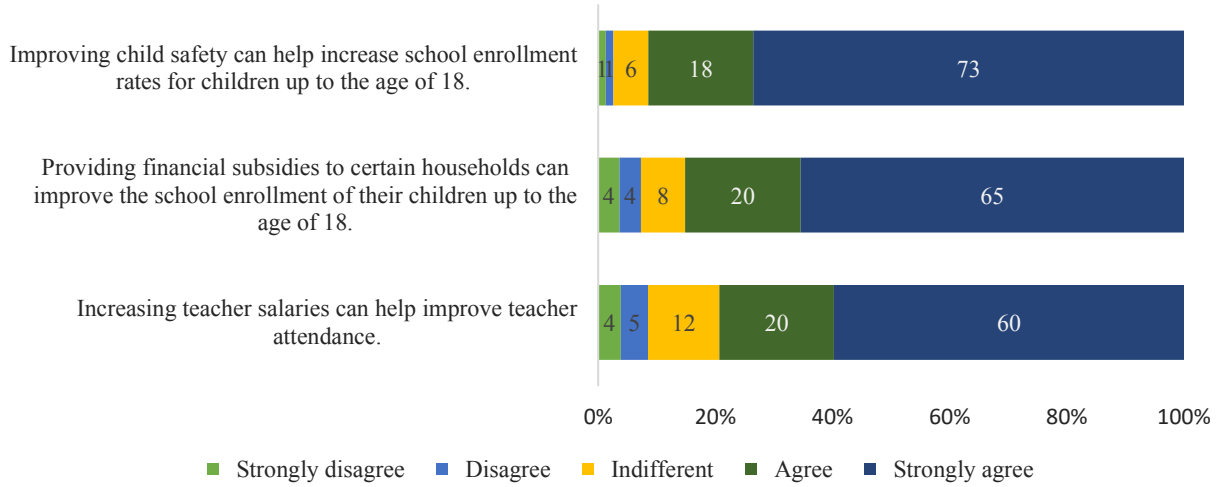
The issue of OOSC in Myanmar is a pressing concern that requires immediate attention. Despite the challenges faced by OOSC, there are potential opportunities and aspirations that can be harnessed to improve their situation. This section will explore the perceptions of the Myanmar population on improving access to education, the role of online education, and the aspirations of OOSC.

Perception on improving access

The MSPS reveals that the majority of the population believes that enhancing safety measures can contribute to an improvement in school enrollment rates. A staggering 91 percent of respondents agree that bolstering child safety would positively affect the enrollment of children up to the age of 18 (Figure 4.5). Additionally, 85 percent of the population concurs that

providing financial subsidies to certain households could enhance the school enrollment rates for primary and secondary school-age children. Moreover, 80 percent of respondents agree that increasing teacher salaries can help improve teacher attendance, highlighting the importance of investing in the education workforce to ensure the delivery of quality education. These findings emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach that prioritizes child safety, financial support for vulnerable households, and improved conditions for teachers to effectively address the challenges facing Myanmar's education system and enhance access to education for all children.

Figure 4.5: Perception about ways to improve access to education



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

Supporting enrolled children who are underperforming

One of the most pressing challenges that emerges from the analysis presented in Section 3.1 is the significant proportion of children in Myanmar who are overage for their respective educational levels. This issue is particularly pronounced at the upper and lower secondary levels, where a substantial number of students find themselves enrolled in classes that do not align with their age group. The situation has been further exacerbated by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing political unrest in the country, which have compounded the long-standing challenges of grade repetition and delayed entry into the education system.

The consequences of having a large number of overage students in the education system are far-reaching. When children are not in age-appropriate classes, they are more likely to become disengaged from the learning process, as the curriculum and teaching methods may not be tailored to their developmental needs. This disengagement can lead to a higher risk of future dropouts, as students struggle to keep up with their peers and lose motivation to continue their education. The long-term implications of this trend are concerning, as it can perpetuate a cycle of educational disadvantage and limit the opportunities available to these children later in life.

Despite the gravity of the situation, this challenge also presents a potential area for improvement in Myanmar's education sector. By addressing the factors contributing to overage

enrollment and implementing targeted interventions to support students in catching up to their age-appropriate grade levels, Myanmar can work toward ensuring that all children have access to education that is commensurate with their developmental stage. This may involve initiatives such as remedial programs, accelerated learning opportunities, and flexible pathways to help students bridge the gap and progress through the education system at a pace that is suitable for their individual needs. By keeping students engaged and motivated, these interventions can help reduce the risk of future dropouts and improve overall educational outcomes.

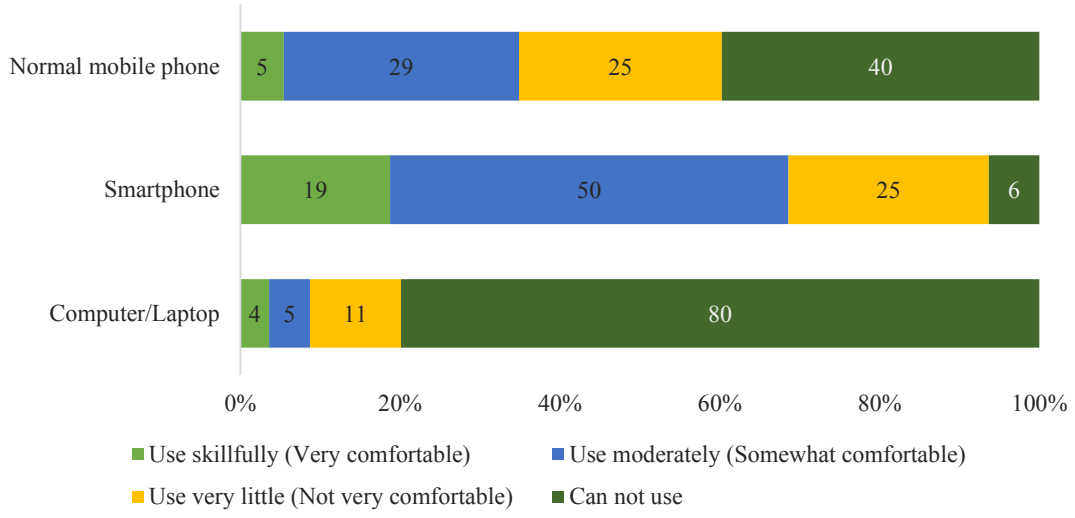
Moreover, tackling the issue of overage enrollment can have far-reaching benefits for Myanmar's education system as a whole. When children are able to attend classes that are appropriate for their age and developmental level, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and successful in their learning. This, in turn, can lead to improved educational outcomes, higher retention rates, and a more efficient use of educational resources. By investing in efforts to address overage enrollment and support students in getting back on track, Myanmar can lay the foundation for a stronger, more equitable, and more effective education system that serves the needs of all its children.

The role of online education

Online education has the potential to bridge some of the gaps in education access, particularly for OOSC and those from marginalized communities. However, the current uptake of online education remains low, with only 4 percent of children ages 6–17 using them. Notably, the children who stand to benefit the most from online learning, such as OOSC and those from low-income and rural households, have the least access to these resources (Fukao et al. 2024). The survey findings reveal that enrolled children have significantly higher access to online education compared to OOSC, with 4.5 percent of children enrolled in school using online education in the last 12 months compared to just 1.5 percent of OOSC. This indicates that online education is currently used as a supplementary tool by children who are already enrolled in schools rather than an alternative to traditional schooling. Increasing the accessibility of online education could help OOSC also benefit from this valuable resource.

However, for online education to be effective, it is crucial to address the digital literacy gap among Myanmar's youth. A self-assessment questionnaire administered as part of the World Bank's phone learning assessment in literacy and numeracy in 2022–2023 reveals significant variations in digital literacy levels among 15 to 17-year-old children, depending on the type of digital device and internet tool. When it comes to using digital devices, a significant majority of children (80 percent) reported that they cannot use a computer or laptop, while only 4 percent considered themselves very comfortable with these devices (Figure 4.6). In contrast, children demonstrated greater familiarity with smartphones, with 19 percent reporting skillful use and 50 percent indicating moderate comfort levels. However, 40 percent of children stated that they cannot use a normal mobile phone, suggesting a potential divide in access to even basic mobile technology.

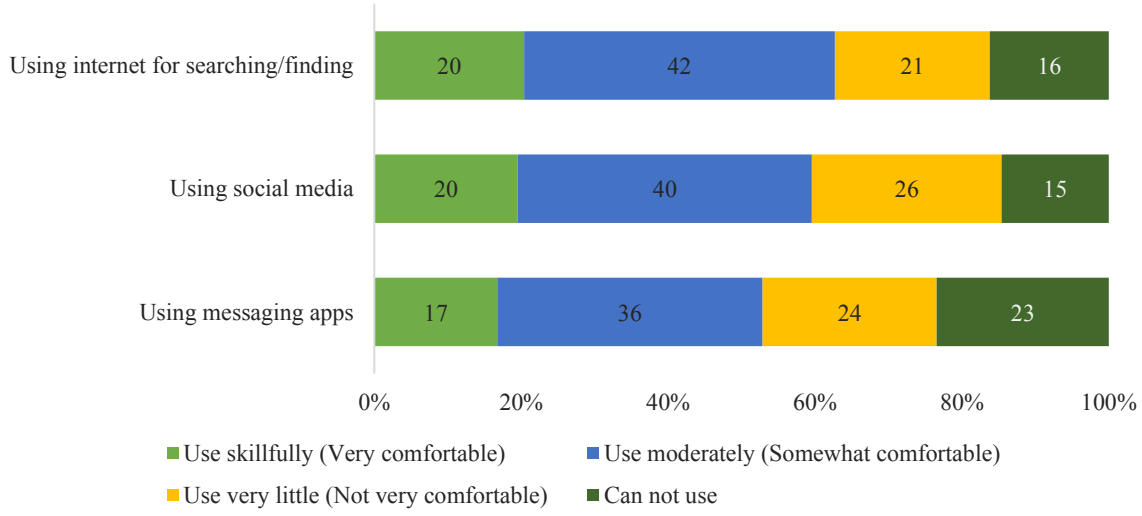
Figure 4.6: Digital literacy in using digital devices among 15–17-year-old children, 2022–2023



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2023).

Children's digital literacy levels in using internet-related tools were relatively higher compared to their proficiency with digital devices. A notable 20 percent of children reported skillful use of the internet for searching and finding information, while 42 percent indicated moderate comfort levels (Figure 4.7). Similarly, 20 percent of children considered themselves very comfortable with using social media and 40 percent reported moderate comfort. However, nearly one-quarter of children (23 percent) stated that they cannot use messaging apps, highlighting a gap in their ability to communicate digitally.

Figure 4.7: Digital literacy in using internet and related tools among 15–17-year-old children, 2022–2023



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2023).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing disparities in digital literacy among Myanmar's youth, particularly in light of the increasing role of technology in education and daily life. The data suggests that while some children have acquired skills in using smartphones and internet tools, a significant proportion still lack basic proficiency in using computers and even normal mobile phones. Investing in digital literacy programs and ensuring equitable access to digital devices and internet connectivity will be crucial in empowering Myanmar's children to navigate the digital landscape effectively and participate fully in the opportunities it presents.

Learning opportunities for OOSC

Myanmar faces significant challenges in providing education to OOSC. To address this issue, various learning opportunities have been developed, including nonformal education programs, online learning courses, alternative education (AE) providers, mobile education projects, and vocational training. This document provides an overview of these initiatives and their role in bridging the education gap for OOSC in Myanmar.

I. Nonformal primary education (NFPE) and Nonformal middle education (NFME) programs

The NFPE and NFME programs aim to provide achievable pathways for overage OOSC and youth to acquire skills and nationally recognized credentials. These alternative programs are delivered through MoE-managed[13] centers outside of formal schooling hours in 81 townships as of 2019–2020, serving approximately 8,000 students per year. Since 2016, the MoE has initiated a small-scale NFME pilot with a few classes, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported the evaluation of this pilot program to inform its future introduction and expansion.

The provision of NFPE and NFME programs plays a crucial role in addressing the learning needs of OOSC, particularly those from displaced or migrant households. The NFPE program is a two-year course that provides a certificate of primary completion, while the NFME program aims for grade 9 completion certificate. Given the increasing number of OOSC since the 2020–2021 school year, these equivalency programs should be expanded at scale. According to the 2014 census, 2.7 million children (approximately 23 percent of children ages 5 to 16) were out of school in 2015–2016, having dropped out or never attended school. Some are working and overage, making them highly unlikely to enroll in formal schools (World Bank 2020). In 2022–2023, the out-of-school percentage rose to 28 percent, followed by a further increase in 2023–2024. NFPE services implemented by local partners with support from UNICEF and DAE are available in 66 townships, 12 state and regions, reaching 13,494 OOSC in 2023–2024 school year. NFME classes are open in three townships reaching 91 OOSC this year. NFPE programs are also implemented by ADRA and RISE in collaboration with local partners with support from EU funding in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Sagaing, Shan, Bago, Mandalay, Magway.

[13] The Department of Alternative Education (DAE) operates the programs in partnership with UNICEF and donor partners.

II. Online learning courses

Coursera, a global open-source online learning platform, has been widely accessible to millions of students during COVID and post-COVID years. Coursera partners with more than 325 universities and organizations worldwide to offer online courses, professional certifications, and degrees in various subjects, ranging from data science and information technology to arts and humanities. However, the instructional language on the Coursera platform is English, which may be a barrier for nonnative English speakers and school dropouts with limited English proficiency. Another potential barrier is internet accessibility, particularly in areas where the majority of OOSC are located. A significant percentage of the country's population uses mobile telephones (117 percent) via MPT, ATOM, Ooredoo, and MyTel operators, and broadband internet facilities are widely connected, with 44 percent internet penetration,[14] through operators such as MPT, Myanmar Net, AGB, 5BB, and others. OOSC in urban and peri-urban areas are more likely to have access to mobile data or Wi-Fi compared to those in rural areas, especially in conflict-affected locations where frequent internet bans occur.

III. Alternative education (AE) providers

The DAE established the AE Partnership Framework and AE Quality Standard Assurance Framework (AEQSAF) in 2021–2022 to promote AE services by multiple service providers. The AEQSAF defines expectations regarding provider and service characteristics (standards), such as management capacity, technical expertise, facilities, organizational structure, compliance, and consultations with parents and communities. This framework will be disseminated through wide-ranging communication campaigns and allows for local adaptations of the delivery model, medium of instruction, and pedagogical approaches to reflect local culture and language.

Myanmar Mobile Education (myME) project (AE service provider)

The myME project has been implementing a mobile learning program for OOSC in urban and peri-urban locations since 2014. The myME project is a unique, nonformal education and outreach program that brings the classroom directly to children who have been compelled into servitude, reaching them where they work (and live). It was the first of its kind to bring education to child laborers, benefiting approximately 20,000 working and out-of-school children.

The myME Box is a practical, low-cost, easy-to-install, and easy-to-use solution to the education crisis in Myanmar, where schools have been closed for over two years due to a severe humanitarian crisis. The Portable Digital Classroom (PDC) with myME Box is designed for out-of-school children and youth (OOSCYs) and is available online or offline. It provides the established myME curriculum as well as additional nonformal education content on an open-source platform, accessible to all children and communities throughout Myanmar. This blended learning approach

[14] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-myanmar.

offers basic literacy, numeracy, practical digital, and life skills training and can be used for self-learning or with a virtual or in-person (face-to-face) teacher.[15]

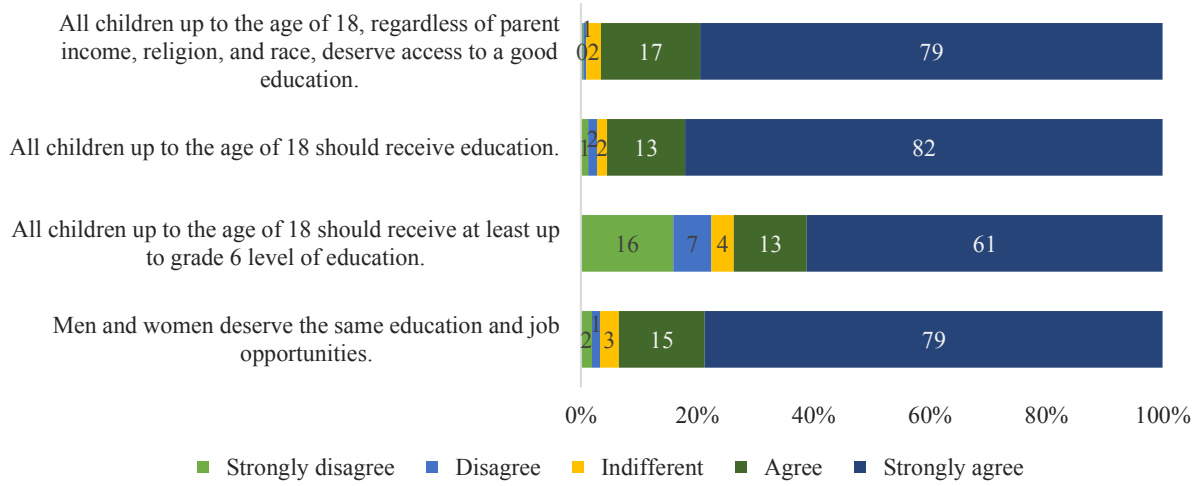
IV. Vocational training opportunities for OOSC

Several local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business partners have been providing vocational training opportunities for youth and OOSC to bridge them to employment and livelihood income. One example is Step-in Step-up (SISU), a not-for-profit organization established in 2016 in Myanmar, targeting vulnerable children ages 10–17. SISU delivers tailored livelihood training courses (3–12 months) with diverse programs such as hospitality, banqueting, sewing, trainee chefs, health care, and agriculture. The organization has had an impact on a total of 750,000 youths, and more than 1,000 trainees have been employed so far. The training courses are free of charge and provide lunch during the sessions. SISU partners with a long list of business and development partners in the country, and their vocational training courses are available in Yangon. Local apprenticeships in bicycle repairing, motorcycle repairing, auto workshops, and small and medium enterprises are also available, albeit with limited opportunities for OOSC.

Aspirations and perceptions

The Myanmar population holds a positive attitude toward education access, as reflected in the findings of the MSPS. Approximately 96 percent of respondents either agree or strongly agree that every child up to the age of 18 deserves and should receive quality education, irrespective of parental income, religion, or race (Figure 4.9). Moreover, an overwhelming majority of the population supports gender equality in education and job opportunities, with 94 percent agreeing that both men and women should have equal access.

Figure 4.8: Perception about the importance of education access, 2024 (%)



Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2024).

[15] http://www.mymeproject.org/.

OOSC have their own aspirations and dreams for the future. They aspire to become teachers, health care professionals, entrepreneurs, and professionals in the art and entertainment industry. However, it is concerning that about one-fifth of their cohort have no aspirations because they are unsure of what they would like to do. OOSC face various concerns, including financial stability, education and career uncertainties, job security, and societal views on them. Addressing these concerns and providing support and guidance to OOSC is crucial in helping them realize their aspirations and potential.

The potential opportunities and aspirations for OOSC in Myanmar are significant, but they require concerted efforts from all stakeholders to be realized. Enhancing safety measures, providing financial subsidies, and increasing the accessibility of online education are key steps in improving education access for OOSC. Additionally, addressing the concerns and aspirations of OOSC through targeted support and guidance is essential in helping them overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams. By harnessing the positive attitudes toward education access and gender equality, Myanmar can strive to ensure that every child, regardless of his/her background, has the opportunity to receive a quality education and fulfill his/her potential.

5. Conclusions

The persistent challenge of low enrollment rates at the secondary education level, continue even after the subsiding of the COVID-19 pandemic. A pressing imperative emerges to not only bring children back to school but also ensure their sustained attendance. Addressing the high dropout rates among 15-17-year-olds is critical. These students are at a pivotal point where completing their education could lead to opportunities for higher education and better employment prospects. Ensuring they remain in school and complete their secondary education is vital for building a skilled and educated workforce, which is essential for Myanmar's future economic growth and development. If these challenges are not addressed, the country could face a significant skills gap, limiting its ability to progress and compete in a global economy.

A comprehensive global perspective underscores the multifaceted nature of interventions required to rekindle and maintain educational engagement in the post-pandemic context. This entails a dual focus on supply-side measures to reopen and sustain schools and demand-side initiatives, including enrollment drives, proactive identification of children at risk of dropping out, implementation of dropout prevention strategies, and provision of financial support to economically challenged families. Guiding the formulation and execution of such interventions, systematic frameworks such as the RAPID[16] model for learning recovery, proposed by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, offer adaptable guidance to the unique contextual need of Myanmar (World Bank et al. 2022a).

The pervasive issue of overage enrollment in Myanmar's education system, at both primary and secondary levels, demands urgent attention. This challenge, exacerbated by the COVID-

[16] The RAPID framework for establishing a learning recovery program focuses on five policy actions: 1. **R**eaching every child and retain them in school; 2. **A**ssessing learning levels regularly; 3. **P**rioritizing teaching the fundamentals; 4. **I**ncreasing catch-up learning; and 5. **D**eveloping psychosocial health and well-being (Saavedra et al. 2022).

19 pandemic and ongoing political instability, not only hinders the learning progress of individual students but also poses significant risks to their future educational prospects. When children are not in age-appropriate classes, they are more likely to disengage from the learning process and eventually drop out of school, perpetuating a cycle of educational disadvantage.

Addressing the factors contributing to overage enrollment and implementing targeted interventions to support students in catching up to their age-appropriate grade levels should be a top priority for Myanmar's education sector. By investing in remedial programs, accelerated learning opportunities, and flexible pathways, the country can work toward ensuring that all children have access to education that is commensurate with their developmental needs. These efforts will not only help reduce the risk of future dropouts but also contribute to improving overall educational outcomes and building a stronger, more equitable education system that serves the needs of all children in Myanmar.

The prevalence of labor market participation among OOSC (upper secondary school age) is a grave concern. It not only deprives children of their fundamental right to education but also exposes them to potential exploitation, hazardous working conditions, and long-term negative impacts on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that combines educational interventions with robust legal frameworks, effective enforcement mechanisms, and community-based awareness campaigns. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by different segments of the population, including gender-sensitive approaches and rural-focused strategies. By acknowledging and addressing these intersecting disparities, Myanmar can take meaningful strides toward creating an equitable environment that safeguards the rights and well-being of all children, regardless of their gender or geographic location.

The analysis of employment status among school-age children in Myanmar reveals significant disparities between in-school and out-of-school children as well as across different states. The high employment rates among OOSC underscore the need for urgent action to provide them with educational opportunities and support. By prioritizing the needs of these vulnerable children and implementing targeted interventions, Myanmar can work toward ensuring that every child has access to education and the chance to build a brighter future.

Targeted strategies are required that focus on bringing OOSC back into the education system while providing support to their families. This may include initiatives such as conditional cash transfers, scholarships, and vocational training programs that incentivize education and provide alternative pathways for those who have missed out on schooling. Moreover, addressing the regional disparities in employment rates is crucial. States with high employment rates among both in-school and out-of-school children, such as Sagaing and Mon, require special attention and tailored interventions. Understanding the specific socioeconomic and cultural factors contributing to these high employment rates can help develop effective solutions.

The emerging trends underscore the evolving challenges faced by students in Myanmar and highlight the need for targeted interventions to address the multifaceted reasons behind

school dropout. While poverty remains a persistent barrier to education, the impact of safety concerns and disengagement from the learning process cannot be overlooked. Efforts to mitigate dropout rates must encompass both economic support for vulnerable families and measures to ensure a safe and engaging learning environment for all students. These underlying factors have to be addressed to foster a more inclusive and equitable education system that enables every child in Myanmar to access quality education and realize his/her full potential.

Prioritizing Interventions:

While this report outlines multiple recommendations for addressing the OOSC challenge in Myanmar, it is crucial to prioritize interventions based on their potential impact and feasibility. We suggest the following prioritization framework:

1. Immediate priority: *Safety and security interventions*. Given that 91 percent of respondents believe enhancing child safety would positively affect enrollment, immediate focus should be on creating safe learning environments. This could involve community-based protection mechanisms and flexible learning arrangements in conflict-affected areas.

2. Short-term priority: *Financial support and poverty alleviation*. With poverty remaining a significant barrier to education, implementing targeted financial support programs, such as conditional cash transfers or scholarships, should be a short-term priority. This aligns with the 85 percent of respondents who believe financial subsidies could enhance enrollment rates.

3. Medium-term priority: *Addressing overage enrollment.* Develop and implement accelerated learning programs and flexible pathways to help overage students catch up to their appropriate grade levels. This will help reduce dropout rates and improve overall educational outcomes.

4. Long-term priority: *Enhancing digital literacy and online education access.* As the digital divide continues to be a challenge, investing in digital infrastructure and literacy programs should be

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Annex

Table A1: Education level and corresponding age and grade groups

Education level	Age group	Grades
Preprimary	5	Kindergarten
Primary	6–10	Grades 1–5 (5 years)
Lower secondary	11–14	Grades 6–9 (4 years)
Upper secondary	15–17	Grades 10–12 (3 years)

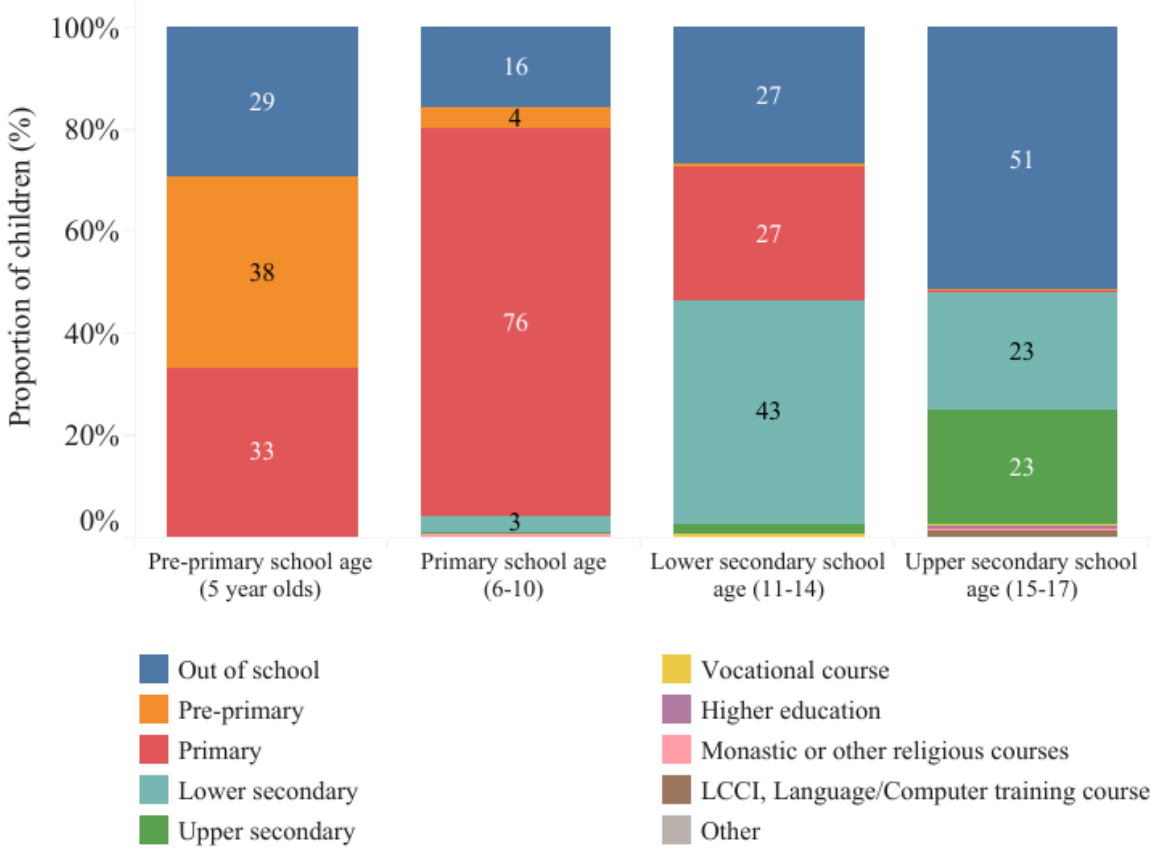
Source: Based on World Bank and MoE (2021).

Table A2: IDPs across states and regions

State	Population	IDPs	IDPs (per 1 million)
Kayah	344,089	131,600	382,459
Sagaing	5,683,996	1,225,300	215,570
Kayin	1,635,149	261,100	159,680
Chin	535,977	84,700	158,029
Rakhine	3,382,097	363,700	107,537
Tanintharyi	1,524,356	141,400	92,760
Kachin	2,004,666	133,600	66,645
Magway	3,922,063	238,900	60,912
Mon	1,959,436	78,100	39,858
Bago	4,965,768	196,700	39,611
Shan	6,672,771	159,000	23,828
Ayeyarwady	6,260,344	—	—
Mandalay	6,684,800	—	—
Nay Pyi Taw	1,341,479	—	—
Yangon	8,853,241	—	—

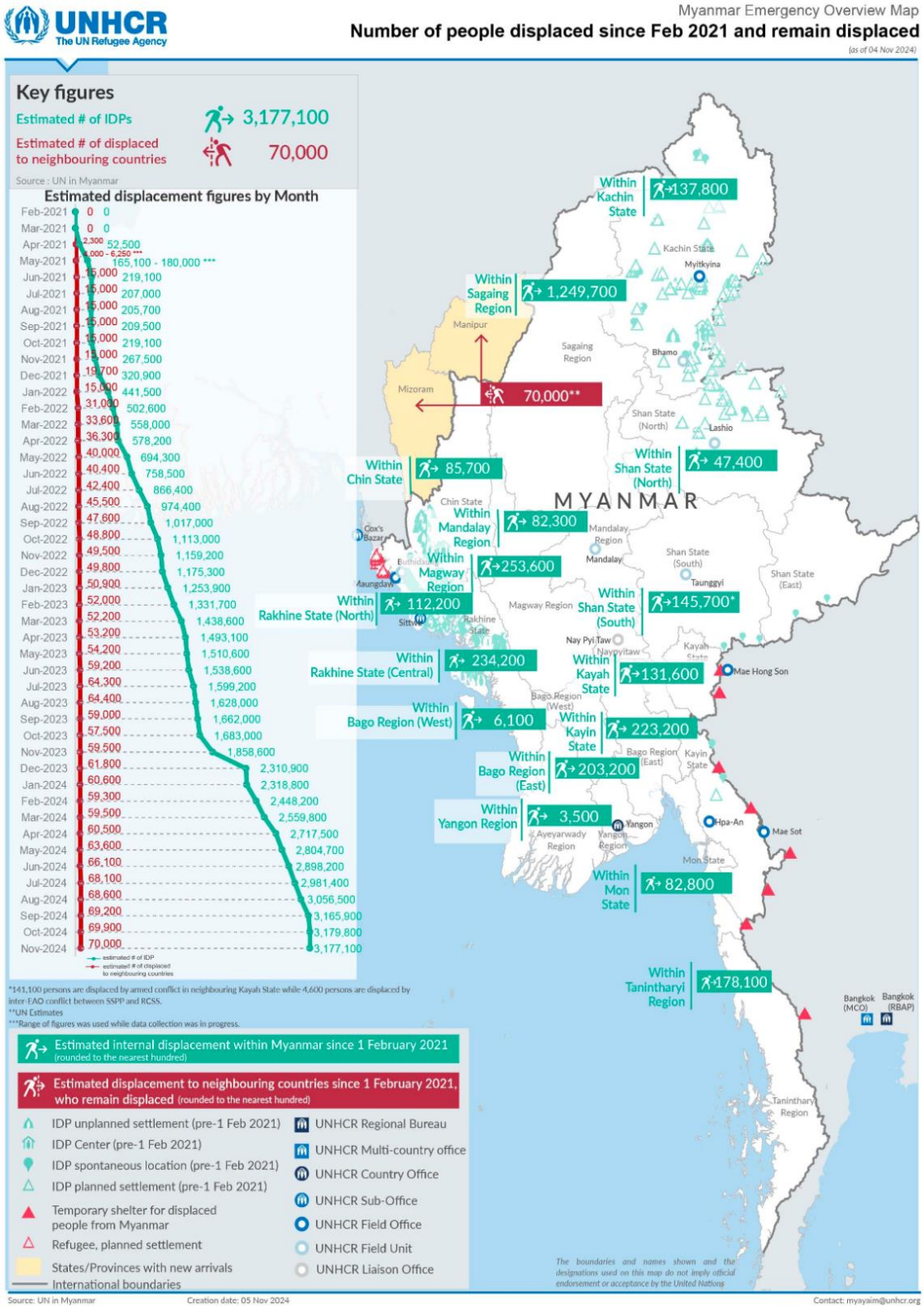
Source: UN in Myanmar (UNHCR).

Figure A1: Schooling status of children by age group (2023)



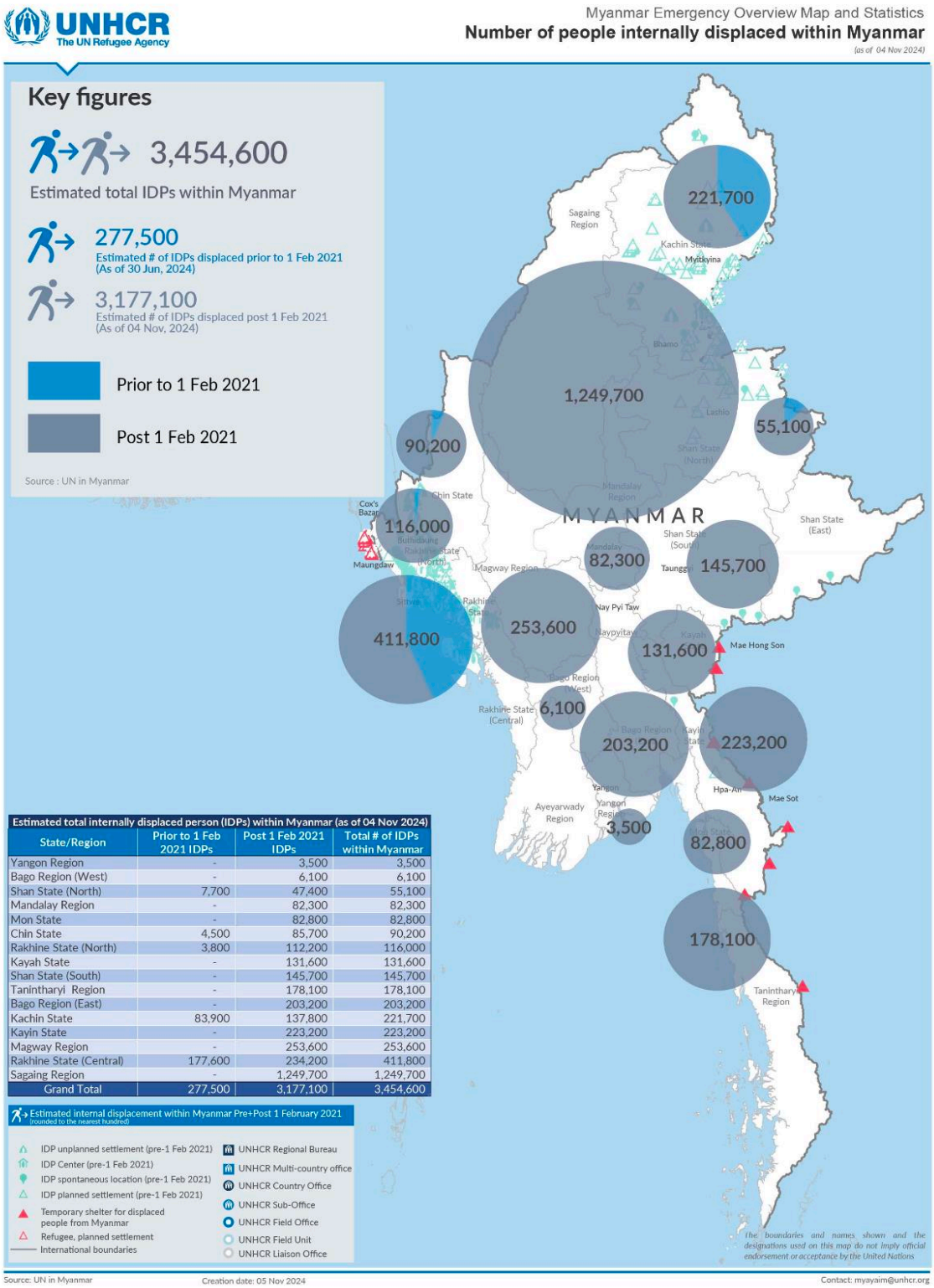
Source: Original figure based on MSPS (2023).

Figure A2: Number of people displaced since Feb 2021 and remain displaced (as of November 2024)



Source: UN in Myanmar (Myanmar Emergency Overview Map).

Figure A3: Number of people internally displaced within Myanmar (as of November 2024)



Source: UN in Myanmar (Myanmar Emergency Overview Map and Statistics).

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