



Diaspora engagement mapping MYANMAR

Facts & figures

Terminology: The terms 'Myanmar's overseas communities' and 'Burmese overseas communities' are used.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: 1.7%
Remittances inflow (USD billion): 1,100

Voting from abroad³:

At embassies/consulates



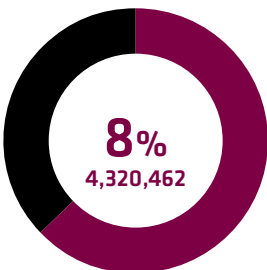
Emigration



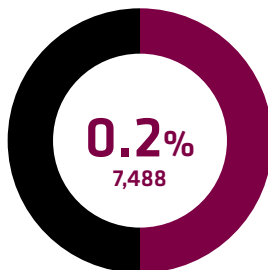
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 61.7%
♀ 38.3%



♂ 50.1%
♀ 49.9%

Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

Top countries of destination



Thailand	1,708,695
Bangladesh	1,246,705
China	367,052
Malaysia	308,095
United States of America	199,585

Myanmar does not have a diaspora engagement policy.

1 [http://data.globalcit.eu/NationalDB/docs/1982%20Myanmar%20Citizenship%20Law%20\[ENGLISH\].pdf](http://data.globalcit.eu/NationalDB/docs/1982%20Myanmar%20Citizenship%20Law%20[ENGLISH].pdf)

2 <http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/asia/MM/burma-myanmar-pyithu-hluttaw-election-law-2010/view>

3 <https://www.irrawaddy.com/datetime/will-millions-myanmar-migrant-workers-vote-2020-election.html>

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 1999** ● **Law Relating to Overseas Employment (LROE)**⁴ (currently being reviewed and revised) sets out the basic architecture for managing international labour migration. It details registration procedures for workers, licensing processes for employment agencies and a range of rights and responsibilities of both workers and employment agencies. The law also provides for the establishment of the Overseas Employment Supervisory Committee (OESC) to provide coordination and cooperation necessary to achieve the law's objectives.
- 2013** ● **National Plan of Action (NPA)**⁵ has four areas of focus: governance of migration; protection and empowerment of migrant workers; inclusion of migration in the national development agenda; and data collection and management. The plan emphasises the importance of establishing skills recognition systems, promoting effective use of migrant remittances for investment at the level of the household, community development and initiating engagement with the diaspora communities to contribute to national development objectives. It seeks to achieve this through a range of channels: legislation, rules and regulation (including the LROE), better coordination at the national level through the OESC, review of bilateral Memoranda of Understanding with destination countries and alignment of national framework with international standards.
- 2016** ● **Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand (renewed in 2016)**:^{6,7} Thailand is the first country of destination for the Myanmar diaspora. However, documentation across borders has been a challenge due to irregular migration flows between the two. In 1992, registration of undocumented migrants in Thailand was trialled. In 2009, the Myanmar government coordinated with the Thai authorities to issue temporary passports to migrants holding a Thai migrant worker registration card. Since signing of the MoU, the Myanmar government has been working towards issuing Certificates of Identity to migrants. These certificates have the longer-term goal of having the migrants apply for a full passport in the future and returning to work in Thailand as legally documented migrants.
- 2016** ● **Code of Conduct for the Members of Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation**,⁸ signed by over 100 recruitment agencies, aims to foster ethical recruitment practices and improve the quality of services provided to migrant workers throughout the process of migration. According to the code, migrant workers are briefed about details of contracts, labour rights, complaint mechanisms, social security, access to healthcare, information on local currency, wages, cost of living, remittances and banking. It also instructs the establishment of a database of all workers, and supporting agencies that can respond quickly to workers' needs.
- 2018** ● **Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan**⁹ for the period of 2018-2030 includes a section on cultivating 'Human resources & social development for a 21st century society'. This focuses on improving the quality of - and access to - social services such as education and health, improved access to food and nutrition, protecting the rights of migrant workers and strengthening the positive linkages between migration and local-level development. This is further elaborated under strategy 4.5 of the plan, which focuses on protecting the rights of migrant workers, and also emphasises the need to harness the expertise, financial resources and energies of migrants for the development of the country.
- 2023** ● **The Amendment to the Union Tax Law 2023**¹⁰ requires Myanmar overseas workers to pay tax on their foreign income. Overturning a previous tax exemption under the 2012 accord, the new law

4 http://apskills.ilo.org/apmagnet/resources/building-labour-migration-policy-coherence-in-myanmar/at_download/file1

5 http://apskills.ilo.org/apmagnet/resources/building-labour-migration-policy-coherence-in-myanmar/at_download/file1

6 https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/ift-fund.org/files/publication/wcms_566066.pdf; The 2016 MoU (not publically available) is based on the following MoU from 2003: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_160932.pdf.

7 Following the newly enforced national conscription law in February 2024 and the surge in numbers of conscription-age men and women seeking employment abroad, the Ministry of Labour announced a ban on any application under the MOU submitted by conscription-age Myanmar men in May 2024.

8 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-yangon/documents/genericdocument/wcms_622961.pdf

9 https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Core_Doc_Myanmar_Sustainable_Development_Plan_2018_-_2030_Aug2018.pdf

10 <https://thedi diplomat.com/2024/04/myanmars-new-taxation-and-conscription-policies-are-likely-to-increase-irregular-migration/>

subjects workers to either a flat rate of 2% or a tiered income tax ranging between 10% and 25% of their earnings. Those who fail to comply face withholding of passport issuance and the Certification of Identity as well as civil and criminal charges.

2024

The Mandatory Remittance Requirement (Notification No.108/2024)¹¹ was issued by Myanmar Ministry of Labour in 2024 to refine the unsuccessful 2023 remittance rule. Following the previous one, it obliges Myanmar workers under MOU schemes with destination countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and South Korea, to remit at least 25% of their foreign income back home through the country's central banking system at a fixed exchange rate, which is significantly lower than the market rate. To strengthen the rule enforcement, this refined remittance rule comes with more detailed procedures as well as punishments, indicating that those who fail to comply will not be able to renew their work permit and subject to a three-year travel ban once they complete the original four-year contract.

» Trends

There is a significant Myanmar diaspora due to labour migration flows, especially to neighbouring countries such as Thailand or Malaysia. Currently, there are no government lead schemes to encourage Myanmar emigrants to return. However, the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and Evidence on Demand (research group supporting major development partners) have called for a structural transformation of Myanmar's economy away from agriculture towards manufacturing and services. The country is interested in wider sociocultural changes in Myanmar through social protection, health and education; it is working towards inter-linkages in these areas with the diaspora in the future. The strengthening of structures related to overseas employment illustrates the importance of labour migration for diaspora engagement in the country. For instance, instead of the Department of Labour taking over chairmanship of the Overseas Employment Supervisory Committee (OESC), the position was given to the Minister of Labour, Immigration and Population. This indicates that the government recognises the importance of the committee and its purpose. The OESC now has three working committees: administrative committee, workers' benefits committee and the workers' rights protection committee.¹² In 2016, the Myanmar government recognised the link between migration and other policies, and pledged its support for job creation and the return of migrants.¹³ Since 2010, the Myanmar government has started on a series of reforms to liberalise the country's political and economic systems. The government is also encouraging its citizens to work abroad and providing them with support and information to do so. Neighbours like Thailand and Malaysia remain attractive destinations for migrants due to higher wages and better employment prospects. Overall, the government has recognised the role of migration in boosting rural development and helping with poverty reduction. Since then, it has strived to develop legal, affordable and safe channels for migration. The military coup has brought a surge in migration into Thailand among the Burmese, who are fleeing clashes between the military and armed groups. Migrants driven out of the country have reinforced existing diaspora populations, and migration flows away from Myanmar are likely to shape the political landscape.¹⁴

11 https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/QBN%20Q3%202024_MYANMAR_final.pdf

12 https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/ift-fund.org/files/publication/wcms_566066.pdf

13 Ibid.

14 2022/37 "Migration in Post-coup Myanmar: A Critical Determinant in Shaping the Country's Future?" by Aung Tun

Achievements

Accessibility: Myanmar has local-level labour exchange offices (LEOs), which are spaces of coordination for migration governance.¹⁵ Some LEOs are also Migrant Workers Resource Centres (MRCs) and are places where aspiring migrants can learn about the opportunities and risks associated with migration, return and reintegration.

Labour Attaches: The appointment of labour attaches in receiving countries is a key protection mechanism employed by sending countries to enhance the protection of their migrant workers. Myanmar has labour attaches in the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Thailand to enhance protection of migrant workers. The role of labour attaches includes vetting potential employers and contracts, assisting with workplace disputes and complaints, providing legal counselling and other support services and monitoring employment conditions to ensure that they are just and fair.¹⁶



Resistance movement: Following the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, a resistance movement has formed to not only provide health care, education, police and criminal justice services, but also to begin laying the foundations of decentralised governance in the country. Diaspora communities are the largest source of funding for the resistance-led administration in Myanmar's least-developed regions. They have raised millions of dollars for resistance groups and humanitarian causes, largely through church networks.¹⁷

Obstacles

- **Lack of resources:** Despite the Migration Division being the focal point in the government for managing international labour migration, its capacity is limited by the relatively small size of the division within the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, as well as its limited technical capability and financial resources.
- **Marginalised Diaspora:** Authorities have long marginalised the diaspora, which has been a vocal critic of Myanmar's government for alleged human rights abuses and mismanagement of the country's economy.¹⁸
- **Fragmentation of Diaspora:** Because Myanmar's overseas community is ethnically and educationally diverse, it is difficult for them to unite and contribute to their country's development.¹⁹ Furthermore, most Burmese abroad are in a precarious situation, making it uncondusive to create strong unions and engage in development work.
- **Political unrest/Military coup:** Since the military took control of the country in February 2021, violence and civil oppression have permeated the country and created a humanitarian crisis. This landscape effectively prevents state-led diaspora engagement, whilst diaspora are – for the most – part engaged in anti-junta advocacy and humanitarian response in parallel to existing humanitarian architecture.²⁰
- **Junta's stringent measures on Myanmar's overseas communities:** The compulsory remittance requirement and foreign income tax are perceived by Myanmar nationals as an extraction of

15 http://apskills.ilo.org/apmagnet/resources/building-labour-migration-policy-coherence-in-myanmar/at_download/file1

16 http://apmigration.ilo.org/resources/implementation-of-recommendations-from-the-3rd-to-10th-asean-forum-on-migrant-labour-afml/at_download/file1

17 In Myanmar, Resistance Forces Pursue Home Rule In Myanmar, Resistance Forces Pursue Home Rule

18 <https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/key-myanmars-development-could-be-its-diaspora>

19 Ibid.

20 DRC (Feb 2022) Diaspora organisations and their humanitarian response in Myanmar. https://demac.euwest01.umbraco.io/media/wjwlnpee/demac_myanmar_2022_e-version.pdf

civilian capital for the purpose of military operations against resistance forces, given that the junta government has been facing financial shortages due to economic sanctions. These schemes not only spur outrage and resistance against government-led diaspora engagement, but also create a greater burden on overseas workers who are usually subjected to precarious conditions. The threat of suspending work permit renewals and travel ban tends to also be counterproductive, driving more workers to resort to irregular migration. The ban on conscription-age Myanmar men to apply to overseas jobs under the MoU also leads to increased numbers of irregular migrants to Thailand and other neighboring countries.”

SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

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Empowerment Trainings

Conducted since 2016, the Empowerment Trainings include a number of local CSOs training local community leaders to provide information, training and support to potential migrant workers. The CSOs include the Rakhine Womens' Union, Tavoyan Womens' Union, Women's Department of the Northern Shan State Baptist Convention and Mawk Kon Local Development Organisation. CSOs disseminate safe migration information and organise trainings for potential migrant workers and their families. They also train local community leaders to empower them to provide safe migration information and trainings, as well as support services to potential migrant workers. This has improved migrant workers' access to information, as workers can receive immediate responses from their community leaders, rather than travelling to the nearest migrant worker resource centre.

EDUCATION
& TRAINING

Twe Let - Increasing the Development Impact of Labour Migration Through Strengthened Governance and partnership

The project was launched in 2017 and is led by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, with support from the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) Consortium, and aims to strengthen skills development training, safe migration practices and financial management.²¹ The project aims to increase the positive role of migration. It provides financial literacy training to households receiving remittances from migrants, provides skills training to migrants to improve their chances of accessing good jobs and provides job-matching support. It aims to reach 50,000 people in Mon, Kayin, Thanintharyi, Shan, Chin states and the Dry Zone by 2020.

EDUCATION
& TRAINING

Happy Return Programme

As the return-reintegration component of South Korea's Employment Permit System (EPS), the programme matches returned Myanmar migrant workers from the Republic of Korea with Korean factories in Myanmar. The programme, instituted by the Republic of Korea in 2009, consists of pre-departure seminars, and skills and business training to prepare the participating workers for their return. Migrant workers can participate in vocational training; pre-return recruitment services (assistance in applying for jobs in Korean companies located in Myanmar); and administrative support for insurance benefit claims. It aims to help workers reintegrate into their home country and continue using their newly acquired skills.²²

RETURN &
REINTEGRATION

21 Ibid.

22 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_733917.pdf



Practical Handbook on the Management of Labour Migration

MIGRANT RIGHTS

The Migration EU eXpertise initiative (MIEUX) launched a handbook to support the efforts of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MLESS) in Myanmar in enhancing their management of labour migration. Training sessions were conducted for the staff of MLESS at the central and local levels to develop the handbook. Upon completion, MLESS staff were equipped with skills to develop and implement information campaigns on labour migration and provide services to migrant workers. A second initiative was conducted on Capacity Building on Labour Migration to support the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP) in Myanmar to understand the public authorities of partner countries so as to better manage migration.²³ This initiative included bilateral meetings; workshops on labour migration management for staff at the operational level; and sessions on ethical recruitment, prevention of exploitation and protection of migrant workers' rights. A draft prevention and protection plan was produced at the end of the initiative in November 2019.

23 <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/actions/192>

Annex: List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

International Organization for Migration Myanmar 1951

IOM Myanmar covers all aspects of migration, including labour mobility, human development, migration health, immigration and border management, migrant protection, counter trafficking, emergency preparedness and post-crisis migration management.²⁴ IOM has a strong presence in Myanmar with over 580 staff working across the country with 12 offices.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2002

Originally, the main role of the ILO was to help the elimination of forced labour in the country and implement strategies to address its root causes. In 2007, a complaints mechanism was set up to enable victims of forced labour to seek help. In 2018, ILO signed the first Decent Work Country Program for Myanmar with the government, employers and workers organisations. The TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme²⁵ is part of ILO's global efforts to promote fair migration. Through delivery of technical assistance and support to governments, social partners, civil society and regional bodies, TRIANGLE in ASEAN aims to create a set of policies, tools and services that enhance the contribution of labour migration to stable and inclusive growth and development. It involves ASEAN six countries, including Myanmar, and is funded by Australia and Canada.²⁶

ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour 2008

The annual forum is an open platform for review, discussion and exchange of good practices and ideas between governments, workers' and employers' organisations, and civil society stakeholders on key issues facing women and men migrant workers in South-East Asia. It works to develop recommendations to advance the implementation of the principles of the ASEAN Declaration on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) 2009

LIFT is a multi-donor fund that aims to strengthen the resilience and sustainable livelihoods of poor households by helping people to reach their full economic potential. LIFT is a significant actor in Myanmar's development. For 2019-2023, the fourth strategic phase of the fund, LIFT's four thematic areas are Agriculture, Markets and Food Systems; Financial Inclusion; Decent Work and Labour Mobility and Nutrition.

24 <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/myanmar/iom-myanmar-mission-overview.pdf>

25 https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_428584/lang--en/index.htm

26 https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_677752/lang--en/index.htm



- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population 2016

The Ministry protects workers' rights, provides social services for workers, promotes higher labour productivity, and participates in international labour affairs. It is also directly responsible for coordinating and overseeing the implementation of LROE and the NPA. The Ministry also has a nine-point approach to their labour migration policy.²⁷

Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1947

The Ministry is involved in the coordination and communication relating to Myanmar's bilateral agreements and MoUs, such as the one with Thailand. It operates embassies and consulates in 44 countries. The embassies help to provide accommodation for citizens in need as well as support them when they run into problems.

- At sub-ministerial level

Migration Division 2012

Within the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the Migration Division is responsible for the management of all aspects of international labour migration. The division is leading the revision process for the LROE. It also participates in discussions on Myanmar's bilateral agreements and MoUs. The division also verifies and approves overseas employment arrangements when recruitment agencies submit the documents and deals with grievances of migrants.

Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation (MOEAF)²⁸

The federation helps to shape the market for the export of labour from Myanmar and recognises the need for more ethical recruitment practices through its development of a Code of Conduct.²⁹

Overseas Employment Central Committee and Supervisory Committee 1999

The OECC is made up of the Minister of Labour along with with high-level officials from the Ministry of Labour and other relevant ministries, together with the heads of organisations related to labour affairs, and suitable citizens. The OECC is primarily responsible for laying down policy relating to overseas employment and coordination for the implementation of the policy. On the ground, the OESC is the primary coordination platform.

Myanmar Statistical Information Service 2015

The service publishes data on the placement of overseas workers according to country of destination through their statistical yearbook publications.

27 https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/ift-fund.org/files/publication/wcms_566066.pdf

28 <https://www.facebook.com/MOEAF2012/>

29 https://www.ilo.org/yangon/info/meetingdocs/WCMS_622961/lang--en/index.htm

Supervisory Committee to Increase the Inflow of Salaries and Wages of Expatriate Myanmar Citizens 2024

A high-level committee established to enforce the country's remittance rules, oversee the inflow of remittances through official channels and ensure the compliance of both workers and their employment agencies. The committee consists of 13 high-level officials from the Office of the Chief of Military Security Affairs.

- At local level

Migrant Resource Centres 2015

TRIANGLE in ASEAN delivers assistance directly to migrant workers and their communities through a network of seven Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) in Myanmar. These MRCs are managed in partnership with government institutions, trade unions and civil society organisations and provide a range of services to migrant workers so that they can get a better understanding of the risks as well as the potential benefits of migration.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

British Rohingya Community (BRC) 2016 UK

✔ Development activities

BRC campaigns for Rohingya rights. It also collects and distributes aid to the camps in Bangladesh. It delivers food and medicines to the camps as well. BRC works with the UK Home Office to reunite families still trapped in camps by bringing them to the UK.

Helping the Burmese Delta (HTBD) 2008 UK

✔ Development activities

HTBD was founded post-Cyclone Nargis by May Tha-Hla and her husband Jon Wilkinson. The couple raised money from contacts and May went to Myanmar to purchase and deliver food and other aid to the affected areas. The organisation also aims to create opportunities for children and adults to build their knowledge, skills and capabilities to progress towards a better quality of life.

Kachin Relief Fund UK

✔ Development activities

A non-profit registered charity organisation in England and Wales. All members are Kachin exiles in the UK who have good contacts and can ensure quick delivery of humanitarian aid to communities in the Kachin state effectively. It aims to promote health and education among internally displaced Kachin people and educate people on the difficulties experienced by Kachin refugees.

Read more about diaspora organisations in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"



Karen Community Association UK 2006 UK

- ☑ **Development activities**
- ☑ **Integration activities**

The association represents the Karen community in the UK and helps the community with problems they face when coming to the UK. It also raises awareness about the situation in Myanmar and raises money to help refugees and the internally displaced. They now have three branches in the UK – Bolton & Bury, London and Sheffield. The group comes together physically for community events and activities. The community organises week-long celebrations of their culture, with a fundraiser and an exhibition about the plight of their people and their new lives in the UK. Their church services provide a sense of community. It uses this opportunity to exchange news back home and this includes visits from people who have recently been in refugee camps or Karen territory.

The Burma Centre Prague 2006 Czech Republic

- ☑ **Development activities**
- ☑ **Integration activities**

A community interest organisation established by the Burmese community in the Czech Republic along with Czech and international supporters of Burma. The organisation's mission is to contribute to the democratisation of Burma and the respect for human rights, as well as to improve the lives of people in Burma and Burmese in exile.

The Myanmar Action Group Denmark

- ☑ **Development activities**

Denmark An organisation of Danish and Myanmar individuals who work to support the democracy movement in Myanmar. Run entirely by volunteers, it aims to increase awareness of the situation in Myanmar, encourage support from Denmark, and support Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) organisers.

The Finland Myanmar Society Ry 2021 Finland

- ☑ **Development activities**
- ☑ **Integration activities**

A secular, non-partisan and non-profit organisation that aims to promote the social and cultural integration of Burmese in Finland and to foster and promote the cultural heritage of Myanmar. Their organisational mission covers a wide variety of development topics or sectors, including poverty reduction, education, gender equality and women empowerment, reduction of child mortality, environmental sustainability, and global partnerships.

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