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**Assessment of Vulnerable Youth Economic Integration
Opportunities in Myanmar**

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Content

Acknowledgements.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Abbreviations.....	4
1. Background an introduction	5
2. Methodology	9
3. Youth economic empowerment: Key issues from stakeholders.....	12
3.1. Through the eyes of youth: economic empowerment as a personal issue.....	12
3.2. Private sector growth and youth economic empowerment	14
3.3. Youth economic empowerment and national development priorities	18
3.4. Tentative findings from the field work.....	20
4. National Framework.....	22
4.1. Legislative and policy framework.....	22
4.2. Current programmes and projects.....	23
5. Conclusions and recommendations	26
Literature	30

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Abbreviations

DSW	Department of Social Welfare
DOL	Department of Labour
DBE	Department of Basic Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
UNICEF	UN Fund for Children
UNESCO	UN Education, Science and Culture Organization
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MOLIP	Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population
MOE	Ministry of Education
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labour
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key informant Interview

1. Background an introduction

This study was commissioned by the ILO's MyPEC project in Myanmar to support the implementation of the National Action Plan on Child Labour (the NAP) in Myanmar. The NAP was developed by multiple national organisations under the guidance of the Technical Working Group on Child Labour (TWG-CL) and led by the FGLID in the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP). ILO, through the MyPEC project, supported the development of the NAP and the project now intends to support the implementation of the NAP in several ways.

Economic empowerment of youth is a key strategy towards elimination of child labour in Myanmar. First of all, the prospects of entering decent employment or self-employment is a core motivational factor for children and families to pursue the long-term goal of education over the short-term goal of increased income through child labour, especially where resources are scarce and pursuing the long-term goal may mean immediate term sacrifices. If the prospects of economic empowerment/decent work at the end of one's education are slim, children are more likely to drop out of school early and enter into child labour¹.

Secondly, support for economic empowerment can be a viable strategy to support young people found in hazardous work or other Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL). Such economic empowerment may take on several forms and would typically be a suitable strategy for older children/young people who cannot – or who may not wish to – go back to the formal education system.

Within this context, the main objective of this study is to promote economic integration to vulnerable youths. In particular this study seeks to:

- Map programme and service providers specialized in economic development skills training and referral systems for vulnerable families and youths
- Identify current skills needed for youth's key economic activities and sectors in Myanmar
- Assess skills development programmes for vulnerable youths.

The economic empowerment for young people, who are trapped in hazardous work (or other WFCL) can take on many forms – and must indeed be matched to the local job market as well as to the skills, interests and aspirations of the young person in question. Often, the support includes skills training combined with other support services, such as life skills training, basic literacy and numeracy and financial management training, support for self-employment, e.g. business skills or seed grants or support for finding employment, e.g. job placement. The exact mix depends (or should depend) on the individual receiving the support. Hence, economic empowerment is a key strategy in removing and protecting young people (below 18 years) from hazardous work and preventing them getting trapped in the WFCL. Protection of young workers (over the minimum age but below 18 years of age) is a core element of the overall strategies in the NAP and hence, this study is, first and foremost, a contribution to the implementation of NAP priorities to protect young workers from hazardous work and the WFCL.

¹ Thompson Reuters (2015) Push for quality education, decent jobs needed to end child labour
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-rights-youth-labour/push-for-quality-education-decent-jobs-needed-to-end-child-labor-idUSKBN00QOK920150610>

According to the 2014 Census², Myanmar's demographic composition is changing substantially as fertility decreases and the population grows older, but the full effects of the changes are not expected to materialise until around 2050, when the ageing population will become a dominant feature in Myanmar. For now, Myanmar is still a relatively young population, and though the youngest cohort of 0-4 years is significantly smaller than the next cohort of 5-9 years old, the largest cohorts are still those below the age of 25 years of age. This also means that there will, for years to come, be a significant influx of young people into the labour market and that ensuring decent work and livelihoods for these young people is essential to national cohesion and development and individual well-being. Linked to this is the need to ensure sufficient, good quality education opportunities at both primary, secondary and tertiary level. This includes also access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), including regulated apprenticeships. Hence, this report is also a general contribution to the national dialogue around youth employment, TVET and education in Myanmar.

The 2015 Labour Force Survey (LFS) included indicators on child labour and on school to work transition. In many ways, the LFS findings function as a baseline for Myanmar as the LFS follows two decades without any similar survey being undertaken.

According the 2015 LFS report³, 10.5% of the total child population of just over 12 million children in Myanmar work. This is just under 1,3 million children and young people in total and out of those, just over 1,1 million are estimated to be in actual child labour. Out of the roughly 1,1 million child labourers, just over half of them – or 606,815 children - perform hazardous work likely to harm their health, safety or morals. There is no estimate for the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL)⁴.

Both boys and girls work but boys are more likely to be in economic activity than girls (at 11.3% of boys and 9.8% of girls respectively). Adolescents are also more likely to work than younger children. Only 1.7% of the 5-11 year olds work, whereas 22.7% of the 12-14 years old work and 75.6% of those between the ages of 15-17 years work, indicating a steep increase in the work participation rate at the end of primary education. Girls seem to be more likely to work in the younger age brackets and boys more likely to work in the older age brackets.

This correlates with education figures in the survey, as school attendance decreases significantly with age when work participation rates increase. 88.9% of the 5-11 year olds and 79.8% of the 12-14 years old attend school but less than half - 47.7% - of the 15-17 year olds attend school. This indicates that a very substantial number of children leave school at the point of transition to secondary level, which is also the point when the work participation rate jumps from 22.7% to 75.6%. The span between the work participation rate and the school attendance rate also indicates that some adolescents do go to school and work at the same time.

² Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (2016) Thematic Report on Population Dynamics. Census Report Volume 4-E, all census reports can be downloaded from <http://themimu.info/census-data>

³ Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and Central Statistical Organization (2016) Myanmar labour force, child labour and school to work transition survey 2015 https://www.ilo.org/yangon/publications/WCMS_516117/lang-en/index.htm

⁴ Household surveys are not usually suitable for generating estimates on WFCL and therefore this is usually not included in LFS data.

WFCL and hazardous work is defined in ILO Conventions 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) and includes child forced labour and keeping children in slave-like conditions, the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the use of children in illicit activities, the use of children in armed conflict and any other type of work that may harm their health, safety or morals (hazardous work)

For all age groups, girls have marginally higher school attendance rates than boys. This also corresponds to the finding that boys are more likely than girls to work full time.

Most children and young people, 60.7% percent, work in agriculture forestry and fisheries. This is followed by manufacturing and wholesale and retail (including motor vehicle repair). In all, these three sectors account for over 80% of the working children. A very small numbers of children work in mining and quarrying and in electricity, gas and water supply

The sectoral distribution may also explain to some degree the relatively high number of children working in hazardous work as the sector with the highest number of child labourers (agriculture, forestry and fisheries) is associated with significant risks and hazards, e.g. toxic substances, heavy work, machinery etc. In addition, some of the sectors with a smaller number of child labourers and young workers are also associated with significant risk and hazard, e.g. mining and quarrying, associated with heavy work, toxic substances, underground/open pit work etc., and domestic work and hospitality, associated with hazardous and unhealthy environments (e.g. isolation or exposure to substance use/abuse) that may pose risks to children's psychological or moral development⁵.

However, some of these sectors are also the sectors that provide opportunities for employment and self-employment to young people. The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan very clearly prioritizes private sector led economic development and job creation⁶ and sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and services are already key sectors for investment in Myanmar (e.g. aquaculture production, garment manufacturing and tourism). Therefore, removing all young workers from agriculture, manufacturing and hospitality would potentially be detrimental both to Myanmar's economic development and to the prospects for individual young people and hence, the protection of young workers is an essential strategy to pursue.

Overall unemployment is low in Myanmar a less than 1%, but the LFS report⁷ points out that the labour underutilisation rate is much higher at 6.7 %. This points to a significant share of the labour force that has less work than what they would wish to undertake. This might be linked to the fact that most workers in Myanmar are on contracts of limited duration and that most of these are day labour arrangements, followed by seasonal contracts. Most contracts (56.2%) are verbal and 31.2% of workers do not know whether or what type of contract they have. Limited knowledge on contracts is often coupled with low level of awareness on workers' rights in general.

The informal and short-term nature of contracts may also, in part explain, why social security coverage is low with only 11.8% of employees having provisions for pension and/or gratuity and a mere 11.7% having maternity benefits and paid sick leave included in contracts. Hence, part of the dialogue on protection of young workers will have to focus not only on the nature of the work, that they undertake, and the risks and hazards associated with the work, but also on the conditions of work, including access to social protection, such as health care and maternity benefits. It is worth noting in this respect, that the level of social protection coverage is lowest for those working in agriculture and

⁵ The description above is a shortened and adapted version of the description included in the background study for the NAP: ILO (2017) Background Report for the National Action Plan on child labour in Myanmar - An overview of issues to be considered in the development of the NAP

https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_29337/lang-en/index.htm;

⁶ Myanmar Times (2018) Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan drafted, govt feedback sought <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/myanmar-sustainable-development-plan-drafted-govt-feedback-sought.html>

⁷ Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and Central Statistical Organization (2016) Myanmar labour force, child labour and school to work transition survey 2015 https://www.ilo.org/yangon/publications/WCMS_516117/lang-en/index.htm

highest in services across all measured social protection benefits. Workers in manufacturing generally fall in the middle, between agriculture and services and the coverage is higher in the formal sector and in urban areas (where most service jobs are located). A number of service jobs are government jobs that typically employ more women and hence the overall coverage is higher for women than men.

According to the 2014 census, most people in Myanmar live in rural areas. Among the 14-18 year olds, who are the focus of this study, 69% live in Rural areas and 31% live in urban areas⁸. Among those, who live in rural areas, most live in the same ward or village where they were born but the picture is very different in major urban areas where in-migration is significant. For example, 47.7% of the respondents in Yangon have migrated. The most common reason for migration was to follow the family. About 25% stated they migrated for work and just over 17% for marriage. On national average, 6% of households have at least one member living abroad and 97.9% of those who migrate abroad do so for work. They are on average 26 years old, stay abroad for 3-4 years and remit on average over eight and a half million Kyats per year to their family. Migration abroad is about twice as common from rural households than from urban households⁹. Migration is thus a significant livelihoods strategy among rural populations in Myanmar and migrant workers tend to be relatively young. Hence, safe migration can be an important dimension of economic empowerment of young people, but as other research show, migration – and especially abroad – can be very high risk with unregulated migration and human trafficking closely linked¹⁰.

Looking at the wider national trends, economic empowerment of young people thus connects very closely with the NAP goals of protecting young workers, both from risks and hazards associated with the nature of work and from working conditions that are not conducive to decent work. A particular concern for young people in Myanmar is ensuring that they can migrate for work safely, both from rural to urban areas in Myanmar and, especially, in the region. An essential element in this process is ensuring that young people have skills and knowledge that match the demands of growth industries where decent work is available.

The remainder of this report will go into more detail on how young people and their employers, as well as government officials and other duty bearers view these issues. Chapter 2 briefly describes the methodology employed in the study. Chapter 3 summarises the findings from interviews and focus group discussions and chapter 4 describes the national framework for training and job support for young people. Chapter 5 outlines tentative conclusions and recommendations.

⁸ Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (2017) Thematic Report on Children and Youth. Census Report Volume 4-M, all census reports can be downloaded from <http://themimu.info/census-data>

⁹ Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and Central Statistical Organization (2016) Myanmar labour force, child labour and school to work transition survey 2015 https://www.ilo.org/yangon/publications/WCMS_516117/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁰ ILO (2017): Risks and rewards. Outcomes of labour migration in South East Asia https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_613815/lang--en/index.htm

Arisman and Ratnawati Kusuma Jaya, Center for Southeast Asian Studies (2018) Protection of Human Rights and Labour Migration for Employment Purpose Across ASEAN <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/latest-news/news/2018/02/02/report-on-protection-of-human-rights-and-labour-migration>

2. Methodology

The study consisted of four stages:

1. **Initial desk study** where the consultants reviewed available information
2. **Field work: Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders.** The national consultant conducted interviews in Myanmar language to ensure that all stakeholders were able to participate fully, without language barriers. Findings were summarised in English though.
3. **Analysis of the findings** based on both the field work findings and the desk review
4. **Feed-back to and validation with stakeholder** to ensure that stakeholders find the initial analysis and tentative findings relevant, accurate and implementable during a workshop held in Yangon in November 2018.

The key steps in the process are steps 2 and 4, during which the consultants, with support from the MY-PEC team, sought to elicit and clarify needs, expectations and concerns among key stakeholders and therefore, the main method applied to the study was key informant interviews. With young people, the national consultant held Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) but with all other groups/organisations/individual she conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Youth representatives and key informants were identified by the consultants and My-PEC staff in consultation and as interviews progressed, more KIs were identified. A second round of KIIs were conducted after the feed-back workshop in November 2018. KIs in both interview rounds included representatives of national and local government, employers and workers' organisations, businesses, NGOs and other civil society organisations and public and private TVET providers. Both FGDs and KIIs were conducted using check lists with open-ended questions to allow for a free and open conversations.

As the key stakeholder group for this study is thus young people themselves, the key informant interviews with Government officials, workers' and employers' organisations and civil society representatives are supplemented with focus group discussions (FGDs) with young people, both young people who are in education and young people who work. Due to time constraints, only a limited number of focus group discussions were held, and findings are not statistically valid. The findings do, however, point to key issues and topics that young people care about and are concerned with.

Young people were identified through education institutions and through MY-PEC partner organisations, working directly with young people, including the youth groups involved in the consultations for the National Action Plan on Child Labour in Myanmar. The MY-PEC team provided support to the consultants to approach partners and education institutions and that the national consultant conducted 6 FGDs with groups of up to 10 young people. Some of the FGDs were conducted with young people who have not received support through My-PEC, though they may have been supported by other organisations (e.g. YMCA/YWCA). One FGD was conducted with former child soldiers who had been released through the ILO supported hot-line. The young people participating in the FGDs pursued different types of education (including university) and skills training, some worked alongside education, some worked full-time and some were looking for employment.

As different stakeholders have different characteristics, check list that apply to different groups of key respondents are included among the tools used in this study. Some items are similar across all groups and others differ.

Selection of geographical focus (townships where FGDs and KIIs took place) was done in consultation with My-PEC and its partners during the desk study and field work preparations stages of the work. Geographical areas for the study were identified based on logistical consideration and based on where

key informants were likely to be able to share information. Despite these considerations being taken into account, the Consultant experienced reluctance on the part of some key informants to share information and this has obvious implication for coverage of the field work and the validity of the information collected.

The youth economic empowerment (YE) study field work sought to identify key strategies that may be employed to improve access to technical education and vocational training and to support access to employment and business start-up among vulnerable young people. This includes both formal TVET programmes and informal and semi-formal programmes and apprenticeships. The study focuses specifically in three key sectors of the Myanmar economy, identified as key economic and employment potential sectors (see chapter 1 also):

- **Garment/apparels industry** is selected as it is a key growth sector in Myanmar and as garments were included in the USDOL's list of goods and services made with child labour in 2018¹¹. Growth in the apparels industry is a political priority and the sector has a relatively large number of formal sector jobs with potential to provide decent work for young people. It is also a sector that employs a relatively large number of young women.
- **Agriculture** is included as agriculture is still a key economic sector in Myanmar and the sector that currently employs most people (by a relatively wide margin even, see chapter 1). Hence, a substantial number of young people are likely to work in agriculture now or in the future and exploring how TVET plays a role in providing decent work within agricultural production in Myanmar can provide important insights for youth economic empowerment (and possibly also for wider agendas such as improving agricultural productivity). Within agriculture, the reports explores aquaculture in particular as aquaculture is a growth industry, with potential for further growth, that may gain in importance as a sector providing decent work in the years to come¹².
- **Tourism** is included as it is a growth sector after the opening up of Myanmar and holds potential for substantial job creation. Tourism is also a sector where very specific skills are needed (language skills, hospitality etc.) and vocational training plays a key role in ensuring that the industry has a skilled labour force to enable its growth. Moreover, tourism is a diverse sector, where both highly skilled, well-paid formal sector employment and very insecure, sometimes exploitative, informal sector jobs co-exist and it will be important to explore how TVET can promote decent work over exploitative practices¹³.

A 'vulnerable young person' for the purpose of this study is a boy or girl between the ages of 14 (minimum age for admission to employment in Myanmar) and 18 years, who is currently in or at risk of entering hazardous work. As per ILO Convention No. 182 (Art3), hazardous work is work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. Hazardous work are those types of work, not allowed between the age of 14 and 18 years, according to the List of Hazardous Work being developed by the Government and civil society partners in Myanmar.

¹¹ <https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/ListofGoods.pdf>

¹² http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/naso_myanmar/en

¹³ <https://hi-tek.io/assets/tourism-statistics/Myanmar2018.pdf>

In practical terms, this might mean someone who has dropped out of school, someone who lives in a remote area with very limited education and decent work opportunities, someone who has become internally displaced or migrated to an insecure situation alone or with his/her family.

3. Youth economic empowerment: Key issues from stakeholders

This chapter outlines tentative findings from the interviews with key informants and focus group discussions with young people. The findings are, where relevant, supplemented with findings from the desk research, but the main focus is on the findings from the field work.

The chapter is structured into four parts: The first part looks at the issues that young people highlighted as their primary concerns; the second part looks at youth economic empowerment from a business/private sector perspective; the third part looks at youth economic empowerment as a national development issue and a government priority; and the fourth and last part draws tentative conclusions from the findings.

3.1. Through the eyes of youth: economic empowerment as a personal issue

Young people are under no illusions about what is required of them: they need to get a job and make a living. The young people who participated in the FGDs also linked chances and opportunities in the labour market to skills and knowledge acquired through education – there is general recognition among people that education and skills are important. When asked to define ‘youth empowerment’ one young person answered:

“Youth empowerment is willingness and hardworking to improve their living standards”.

And another said:

“Youth empowerment is the ability of upgrading their intellectual capacity and developing their work related skills”.

It is also very clear to young people that an income is needed for the benefit not only of one self, but one’s family as exemplified in this quote from a vocational training student:

“Youth empowerment is that youth can get a good job with enough income for self and family support”.

However, the young people who participated in the FGDs faced multiple constraints, both in their access to education and skills training and in their search for decent work.

While this sense of responsibility is seen as very positive, also by key informants interviewed in KIIs, some pointed out, that children and young people in Myanmar often suffer exploitation as a result of irresponsible parenting. Some parents expect that children work excessively and forego education to sustain the family, even in cases where the main breadwinner is not working due, for example, to substance abuse problems. While this may not be the common situation, there is research from Myanmar and among Myanmar migrant families in the region that points out that the cultural narrative of “a good child” as one that contributes heavily – or even takes responsibility for – sustain parents and other family members is common and a driver of child labour¹⁴.

¹⁴Asia Foundation and ILO (2015) Migrant and Child Labor in Thailand’s Shrimp and Other Seafood Supply Chains: Labor Conditions and the Decision to Study or Work https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_430209.pdf;

ILO (2017) Background Report for the National Action Plan on child labour in Myanmar - An overview of issues to be considered in the development of the NAP

https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_29337/lang-en/index.htm;

ILO (2016) Knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) study on child labour in Yangon, Ayeyarwady Region and Mon State https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_27675/lang-en/index.htm

Location is a key determining factor for both educational and work opportunities. Children and young people in rural areas generally experience greater difficulties in accessing education, right from primary level, and vocational skills training as schools and training centres are fewer than in urban areas. Moreover, education in rural areas is sometimes seen as substandard in terms of quality. Moreover, job opportunities are seen as substantially more limited in rural areas, prompting young people to migrate in search of better opportunities. Related to this, some of the young people highlighted that their job hunts were constrained by very basic factors such as limited transport options or lack of money to pay for transport. The fact that such basic requirements cannot be easily fulfilled does, *all other things being equal*, render young people more vulnerable, for example to unscrupulous recruitment agents that trap migrant worker in debt bonding through initial coverage of transport costs.

The general situation of the family also impacts opportunities, with dire economic circumstances acting as a limiting factor. Children from NFE classes generally described how the economic constraints on their families had prevented them from attending formal school. This also links with the cultural narrative of “the good child” described above.

Health and disability status came out of the FGDs as another factor that limits opportunities and children and young people living with disabilities may face discrimination both in access to education and in their job opportunities. For example, a disabled girl dreams of becoming a teacher but is uncertain as to whether anyone would eventually hire a teacher who has an impairment.

This is supported by information from the KIIs. While KIs did list several very significant specific job placement initiatives, e.g. in hotel and tourism and banking, and some of the businesses participating in the KIIs specifically targeted employment of people with disabilities, KIs also highlighted structural issues that limit employers’ ability and willingness to employ young people with disabilities. These relate, to a great degree, to the basic qualifications of young people with disabilities who face barriers in access to education to begin with. Therefore, young people living with a disability is even less likely than other young people to possess the qualifications required for a job. Hence, employers must be determined to provide not only reasonable accommodation in the working environment, but also in initial training – and perhaps also extended initial training, leading to young people with disabilities facing extra high barriers to labour market entrance.

None of the children and young people who participated in the FGDs explicitly related limited options to discrimination based on ethnicity or language. It should be borne in mind, however, that other research points to ethnicity and language as a factor that impacts educational opportunities, partly because it interlinks with location, i.e. ethnic minorities often live in remote rural areas where services are not as easily available as in urban areas¹⁵. There is therefore significant reason to explore initiatives that would specifically cater for the 69% of the 14-18 years old young people who live in rural areas, such as mobile training facilities and community-based training, including apprenticeships (see below).

Some the children, especially working children and children attending NFE, had very limited knowledge about the importance of obtaining a Citizen Scrutiny Card in order to obtain social services. This could be seen as a clear illustration of the marginalisation of children from poor households with limited knowledge and resources translating into poorer access to education and other services.

¹⁵ ILO (2017) Background Report for the National Action Plan on child labour in Myanmar - An overview of issues to be considered in the development of the NAP
https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_29337/lang-en/index.htm;

Hence, this is a clear manifestation of the vicious cycle of poverty, poor education levels, limited knowledge and other individual and social capital that perpetuates poverty and child labour across generations. Several KIs, offering vocational training raised the issue of Citizens Scrutiny Cards as well, explaining how training programmes may support trainees to obtain the card.

The children and young people with limited education recognised that their limited education is a constraint to getting a good job in and off itself. Several of them expressed strong emotions that this makes them feel sad and depressed. Interestingly, some of the young people who have attained higher education or completed TVET also mentioned that they feel sad and depressed because their studies and training has not led them to decent work. Rather, they perform menial tasks for poor pay, not using their educational training and qualifications. This may be the result of mis-matches between the education curricula and current labour market requirements (see below) and the young people who participated in the FGDs generally highlight, that the government needs to improve not only the accessibility, but also the quality and relevance of education in Myanmar. Some expressed the view that better access to quality education would also better empower young people to stay out of gambling and substance abuse, seen as a major risk to young people.

3.2. Private sector growth and youth economic empowerment

Key Informants (KIs) interviewed for the youth empowerment study includes representatives of workers' and employers' organisations, government, private businesses in the focus sectors of agriculture, garments and hotels and tourism, NGOs and INGOs, development partners and international organisations engaged in TVET, education, employment promotion and migration management.

Across the board, KIs agree that youth empowerment is a crucial current issue for Myanmar and that ensuring access to quality education and training for children and young people is essential to individual children and young people's opportunities in life as well as to Myanmar's national development.

Several KIs identified a mis-match between the qualifications young people acquire in the education system and the needs of the labour market. In particular, KIs highlight that young people who graduate from school and vocational training institutions tend to lack the soft skills needed in the 21st century labour market. This include communication and team work skills, ability to inquire and think critically and skills to manage one's personal life (e.g. knowledge about options, financial literacy, ability to stay clear of drugs abuse etc.). Hence, several NFE and vocational training programmes focus heavily on developing soft skills.

This lack of soft skills leads to employers having to spend substantial resources on re-training young employees and it drives up the costs of doing business and lowering productivity. The repercussions of this might be that Myanmar is considered a less-attractive investment destination for well-regulated, formal sector foreign investors that can provide good quality employment opportunities for young people. The skills mis-match appears particularly strong in the tourism and garment manufacturing industries, where employers appear to re-train graduates almost routinely.

The skills mis-match may also be a factor in the experiences of some young people, detailed above, that they do not get jobs that match their qualifications. Part of their experience may have to do with employers finding that they do not have the necessary qualifications and therefore they are "relegated" to menial tasks to start with.

Also, some KIs highlight the limited knowledge on occupational issues, both among children and young people, among parents and among employers, notably smaller businesses. Two areas stand out:

Knowledge about age limits and what constitutes child labour and what does not. This also links with the expectations on children, i.e. the narrative of “the good child” discussed above. One KI shared examples of how parents will try to get their children below legal working age into formal sector garment manufacturing operations with strict codes of conduct by forging their Citizens Scrutiny Cards.

Moreover, there is limited knowledge about occupational safety and health and, more specifically, how to protect young workers from hazards, leading to young workers between 14- and 18-years performing tasks that are not suitable for their age. The speedy adoption and implementation of the list of hazardous work¹⁶ is therefore high priority.

Moreover, stakeholders across the board highlighted that the current education system is not conducive to protecting young workers and to promoting TVET as an attractive education option. The latter, it was stressed, is a priority as there seems to be a general preference for academic education and white collar jobs among families in Myanmar. This preference does not match labour market needs well and it leads to young people facing difficulties finding employment. It also leads to young people, who do not pursue academic education often staying unskilled. This increases vulnerability, not when young people migrate to Thailand or elsewhere in the region as they will have limited options and be confined to low-pay- high-risk jobs, KIs stressed.

Currently, TVET institutions are only open to those who are 18 years or above. This is instituted to avoid students doing hazardous work during practicals and is perceived as a requirement for living up to agreements in the ASEAN community. The desk study, undertaken for this report, indicates however, that the education system in several other ASEAN countries (e.g. Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia) allow for young people to pursue vocational training below the age of 18 years, for example through the inclusion of a vocational stream in secondary education¹⁷

In practice, this means that government run TVET is not open to young people after the end of compulsory primary education, only after secondary education in high schools. Hence, young people who leave school after compulsory education cannot attain TVET certificates and are more likely to simply start working. It also means, that young people who wish to pursue a trade have to go through substantial academic/theoretical secondary education that they may not find attractive. As such, the unintended consequences of rules that were meant to protect young people, may render young people vulnerable to hazardous child labour and to informal apprenticeships that are more akin to child labour than training. This is all the more so, as Myanmar does not have a formalised system for standardised and overseen apprenticeships and apprentices are generally dependent on the master craftspeople to decide, what to teach and how to do it.

Hence, stakeholders stressed the importance and urgency of re-organising the way in which TVET is organised, allowing young people below 18 years access to TVET institutions and developing a coherent apprenticeship framework under which, accredited master craftspeople can train young people for trade tests and certification.

¹⁶ ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment requires that members state s adopts a list of hazardous jobs and occupations that are likely to harm the health, safety and morals of children and that are, therefore, prohibited for anyone below the age of 18 years.

¹⁷ <https://unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=World+TVET+Database>

In other **ASEAN** member states, TVET is open to primary school leavers through different means.

In **Malaysia**, for example, compulsory primary education is six years, transitioning into lower secondary education, which is split into two streams: 'Traditional' secondary education and a 'Basic Vocational Education' stream, lasting three years. At higher secondary level, students can continue to pursue the chosen stream, or join a third stream at technical schools, leading to a certificate with optional vocational subjects included. The technical schools are open to students who pursued vocational training and those who pursued traditional high school at lower secondary level. Integrating vocational training into secondary education streams allows for 15-18 year olds to pursue TVET, rather than having to go through high school first. This may make secondary education substantially more attractive to some families and young people.

In **Vietnam**, primary school leavers may also choose between a 'traditional' and a vocational stream for secondary education. In Vietnam, compulsory education extends through lower secondary education. Students, who pursue vocational secondary education can attend post-secondary college education if they wish to qualify for university level tertiary education. Hence, choosing a TVET education path will not rule out pursuing academic education later on. This may make TVET a more attractive education option in a context where white collar jobs and academic education is valued highly by families.

In **Cambodia**, compulsory education also covers lower secondary school but students may choose to join a trade school, rather than a high school, at the end of primary education. In Cambodia the academic and the vocational stream run parallel throughout and while this offers less flexibility for students, it may be an easier system to establish and manage if urgent reform is required.

Source: UNESCO and UNEVOC World TVET Database

<https://unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=World+TVET+Database>

In terms of protection of young workers, it was also highlighted that young people migrate, both in the country and in the region in search of employment and that protecting young migrant workers from exploitation and abuse is an essential ingredient in youth empowerment in Myanmar. Pre-departure training was highlighted by several KIs as an important initiative. Such training needs to include both skills training, that allows young migrant workers to apply for good jobs, as well as soft skills that will allow them, for example to tell the difference between genuine recruitment agents and human traffickers. The fishing industry was highlighted as an industry where skills training is needed to lift young migrant workers out of high risk situations in other countries and where the government runs skills training that not only prepares for domestic employment, but also migrant work.

In terms of employment, practices vary between and within sectors it seems. In garment manufacturing many employers do not allow workers below the age of 18 years in the factories, while others allow young workers to undertake specific tasks supporting the production (e.g. sweeping the floors). In the tourism industry, employers generally indicate that young people are only employed in hotels from the age of 18. In both sectors, initial training also happens from the time of employment – so, mostly from the age of 18 years.

In aquaculture, the picture may be more mixed as young people may be helping out in family undertakings and there is therefore an increased need to ensure that young people, parents and employers know the difference between acceptable work for young people and hazardous work.

For aquaculture, it was also highlighted that making young people aware of the career prospects in aquaculture is an important, not least as aquaculture provides job-opportunities in rural areas and can therefore be an alternative to the labour migration that increases the risk of exploitation if not properly managed.

Job placement and regulated apprenticeships were identified through both KIIs and the partner workshop as an area that holds promises and needs further attention and development in Myanmar, both to make TVET increasingly accessible, to improve quality and relevance of the training to labour market needs and to support the transition from school to work for young people.

While regulated apprenticeships are not pursued to any significant extent, a number of organisations and initiatives in Myanmar promote job placements, internships etc.

For example, the Myanmar mobile Education Project (myME) provides non-formal education programmes to working children, reaching out to children in tea shops and similar work places as well as to employers and parents. Part of the training offered includes TVET and myME collaborates with business partners to include job placement and internships for trainees in different sectors.

Initiatives may also focus on a particular sector. For example, the Myanmar Sustainable Aquaculture Program (MYSAP) under the Myanmar Fisheries Federation, supports young people in both college and high school to undergo training on aquaculture and facilitates the placement of young people in job-training

Sources:

<http://www.mymeproject.org/>

<http://www.mysap-myanmar.com/>

It was clearly stated in several KIIs that ensuring good quality education and training, including education for soft skills and as part of safe migration, is a Government responsibility. However, KIIs also recognise that employers, training institutions, parents and other key stakeholder have direct responsibility for youth empowerment and that Government resources are limited. Hence, NGOs/INGOs, employers, international organisations etc. need to contribute actively to making quality education and training available. This can be done in multiple ways:

- by supporting the conceptual thinking around quality education and training;
- by providing capacity development support and funding;
- by actually running training facilities in coordination and co-operation with Government departments and other stakeholder;
- by piloting innovative ways of raising the profile of TVET and providing training;
- by placing the importance of vocational training and good quality, relevant education on the national and public agendas etc.

3.3. Youth economic empowerment and national development priorities

The National Youth Policy¹⁸, developed by multiple government departments, representatives of young people and other stakeholders under the leadership of Ministry of Social Welfare, relief and resettlement and the NAP on Child labour both clearly recognise the importance of youth economic empowerment – and youth empowerment in a broader sense. Hence, there can be no doubt that youth economic empowerment is a national priority, even if Myanmar does not have a specific youth employment policy or similar.

This is very clearly reflected in the KIIs and FGDs undertaken for this study also. Both youth participating the FGD and KIIs recognise that education and vocational training, including development of both academic, vocational and soft/life skills needs to be a national priority if Myanmar is to develop economically and socially. This also includes a need to revise the policy and legislative framework governing TVET to allow those below the age of 18 years to pursue TVET (as discussed above under 3.2).

As discussed above, the youth empowerment agenda is critical to Myanmar's national development priority to attract foreign direct investment in key economic sectors, such as garment manufacturing and tourism. Without a skilled work force, who possess 21st century soft skills, solid vocational skills, language skills etc. Myanmar will be a less attractive country to invest in.

Youth empowerment is also a key contribution to safe migration, which is recognised as a national priority as well. Young people with strong skills are more likely to find decent work and less likely to become victims of exploitation. In this regard, skills relate both to actual technical (or academic) skills and qualification and soft skills, not least knowledge of potential risk factors and how to protect against in the migration process. This goes for both in-country and cross-border migration.

¹⁸ The Global New Light of Myanmar (2018) Myanmar Youth Policy released
<http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/myanmar-youth-policy-released/>

According to the ILO, one fifth of Myanmar's labour force consists of migrant workers, whose earnings and remittances are key to the economic well-being of their families. Therefore, empowering youth to protect themselves and strengthening the capacity of responsible government staff to manage migration well are key components in the ILO's TRIANGLE ASEAN Project. Under the project, unions and other organisations are supported to reach out to workers with pre-departure information. This is combined with steps to improve migration management, for example through regulation and oversight of recruitment agencies that play a key role in securing work abroad and that have been associated with practices leading to debt bonding and other forms of exploitation.

ILO is one of several organisations supporting the empowerment of young migrant workers. For example, IOM, through its IOM-X project reaches out to migrant workers, using short on-line videos under the theme "Knowledge is power", aiming to empower young people with knowledge about safe migration. Videos are produced in Myanmar language in collaboration with MOLIP and build on the lesson, that migrants who have access to good quality pre-departure information usually have more successful migration experiences.

Sources:

https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_622433/lang--en/index.htm

<https://www.iom.int/news/iom-x-video-series-targets-myanmar-migrants>

It should be recognised, however, that young people's experiences seem to be very much that they would like to live and work in their native area if opportunities for education and jobs were available. Hence, providing such opportunities as both an alternative to and as preparation for migration is key to empowering young people (please, refer to the example from MYSAP above on how promoting local employment may be done). It was highlighted also, that returning migrants often face discrimination and limited job opportunities and hence migration can both be an important livelihood option and a substantial risk factor.

As such, we are looking at a cyclical relationship that can either be a vicious circle or a virtuous, depending on the policies that are implemented. Poor education opportunities in rural areas lead to limited economic growth and job opportunities, which in turn fuels unsafe migration. Access to relevant, quality education and training, on the other hand, may both induce local economic growth, more local job opportunities and protect migrant workers.

Hence, the underlying variable of essential importance, from a national development point of view, is relevant, high-quality education at all levels and equally relevant, high-quality TVET. Several KIs pointed out, that Myanmar has a functional national skills classifications system under MOLIP that makes it possible to obtain trade certificates for a number of sectors, including the three sectors explored for this study. As such, the TVET framework is in place and the main challenge is not the lack of regulations and frameworks. Rather, the main challenge is that the education, leading to certificates is not always of sufficient quality and relevance and that TVET is not open to young people below 18 years, rendering some young people extremely vulnerable to hazardous child labour, as discussed above. Moreover, it should be stressed that there are important initiatives, piloting changed TVET practices underway (such as the examples from my-ME and MYSAP presented above) and that further work to map, document, learn from and scale up successful initiatives might be a very useful exercise as a first step towards the reforming the TVET system – which was identified as a necessary step

towards economic empowerment of young people in Myanmar by several KI and workshop participants.

In addition to the issues related directly to the economic empowerment of young people, it should be highlighted that drug abuse came across as a key concern in several KIIs. Tackling drug abuse is very clear seen as national priority, both to save individual young people and families from the emotional and physical suffering and the poverty related to drug abuse, and to stop the country's human resource going to waste.

3.4. Tentative findings from the field work

Summing up, it is clear that key stakeholders are all in agreement that youth economic empowerment – and youth empowerment in a wider perspective - is a clear priority for Myanmar for multiple reasons.

First of all, limited education and job opportunities have direct costs to young people who may become sad and depressed, end up in drug abuse, get trapped in poverty cycles, end up in hazardous child labour or as victims of debt bonding and human trafficking in migrations gone wrong.

Secondly, businesses have an urgent need for qualified workers who match the skills requirements in their operations. In addition to technical skills, language skills etc. soft – or life – skills are identified as essential and as something that young worker often lack. Limited skills in young workers put a brake on productivity.

Thirdly, youth economic empowerment is essential to the wider national social and economic development. A well-educated and trained labour force is essential to attract investment and expand economic activity in Myanmar. Moreover, the costs associated with young people being subject to hazardous child labour, human trafficking and debt bonding, suffering depression and injuries etc. are considerable.

Hence, youth economic empowerment – and youth empowerment in a wider perspective – is recognised as a national priority, notably in the Youth Policy and in the child labour NAP.

The starting point for youth economic empowerment is essentially to make sure that relevant, good-quality and accessible education, which builds both academic, technical and soft skills, is available to all children and young people in Myanmar, regardless of where they live, their ethnicity, gender, disability status etc.

Importantly, stakeholders stressed that the TVET system needs to be re-organised to allow for young people below the age of 18 years to pursue TVET when leaving compulsory, primary education. This would include looking into options such as integrating a TVET stream into secondary education and establishing a system for regulated apprenticeships. Pending this overhaul – which is most likely a medium to long term venture – organisations (both government, business and civil society) can pilot approaches and generate experiences that will be useful. Regardless, in depth study of the TVET system in Myanmar compared to other countries, outlining options for a more inclusive system that better addresses the needs of both young people and employers in terms of accessibility and training content is needed as a matter of priority.

It is also recognised, across the board, that Government is the primary duty bearer, but that all relevant stakeholders – young people, employers, trade unions, NGOs and INGOs, international agencies – need to work together and that everyone has an important role to play. It follows, that coordination and communication between these multiple actors is an essential component and that government needs to implement policies that specifically promote economic empowerment of youth.

These findings are in line with the 2012 Call for Action on Youth Employment, adopted by the 101st International Labour Conference in 2012. In 2012 the ILO member states decided to call on governments and social partners to put in place:

- Macroeconomic and employment policies, that incentivize the economic growth and job creation;
- Labour market policies that promotes the employment of young workers in decent work,
- Programmes to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment, including for young people
- Skills training and school to work transition programmes that allow young people to complete education and training and transition to decent work; and
- Rights at work, i.e. protecting young workers against hazardous child labour and other forms of exploitation at work.¹⁹

Since the adoption of the 2012 Call for Action on Youth Employment, the ILO has promoted the youth employment agenda very actively across the world, not least in South East Asia, for example through training and capacity development.

Initiatives include the free training package [Rights@Work4Youth](#) that includes guidance for governments, workers and employers on how to promote young people's knowledge on their rights at work. The package includes information on issues such as contracts, occupational safety and health, conditions of work etc. for young people and can be used both for training and as handy reference document.

¹⁹ ILO (2012) The youth employment crisis: A call for action Resolution and conclusions of the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 2012 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_norm/--relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_185950.pdf

4. National Framework

4.1. Legislative and policy framework

As mentioned in chapter 3, Myanmar does not have a youth employment policy, but Myanmar does have a Youth Policy outlining the different dimensions of youth empowerment. The Policy, which was launched on 6 January 2018 sets out priorities around education, health, drug hazards, job opportunities, economics, political research, literature, arts and culture. As such the Youth Policy priorities correspond closely to the issues raised in the FGDs and KIIs undertaken for this study and its implementation will be critical to youth economic empowerment in Myanmar. It is important to note also, that in line with the ILO Call for Action, youth economic empowerment is not completely identical to the youth empowerment agenda, but also requires government to implement wider economic and employment principles that promote youth employment – but overall, the national policy framework recognises the importance of youth economic empowerment in Myanmar.

As also mentioned earlier, the NAP on Child Labour clearly recognises the need to promote access to quality education and, not least, the importance of protecting young workers. Hence, the brief description of some of the existing projects and programmes below might support the implementation of the NAP by providing insights on which projects and organisations might have lessons that can be used for the implementation of the NAP. It should be noted, however, that the overview below is not a good practice and lessons evaluation or documentation and partners may wish to consider undertaking a more systematic assessment of lessons to understand better how initiatives can be scaled up and replicated.

Also, Myanmar has in place an Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2016 - 2021²⁰ (NESP) based on the National Education Law of 2014 and the amendments to the National Education Law of 2015. The Plan takes a life-long learning approach to education and start by stressing that:

“In today’s global economy a nation’s success depends fundamentally on the knowledge, skills and competencies of its people. Countries which invest in education are likely to reap substantial long-term benefits, such as greater economic and social prosperity.”²¹

This approach also underpins action to address the issues raised in FGDs and KIIs for this study and the NESP prioritises wide-ranging set of educational reforms that are aimed at, *inter alia*, providing access to education for children in remote areas and from ethnic minority groups, improve the quality of education at all levels, including establishing world class tertiary education systems where universities have autonomy over their teaching, and an effective TVET system that match the labour market needs (this list is not exclusive, please refer to the NESP for additional priorities).

The NESP is a very ambitious framework and its priorities are clearly interlinked with priorities under other policy documents, such as the NAP on child labour. Hence. Communication and coordination amongst key ministries are of the essence. This is even more so as both basic education, NFE and TVET is offered by multiple different departments and organisations²².

Primary and secondary education is accessible primarily through government schools run by the MOE (through the Department of Basic Education). In addition, the Ministry of Border Affairs offers primary

²⁰ Ministry of Education (2016) National Education Strategic Plan 2016– 2021 http://www.moe-st.gov.mm/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NESP_20Summary_20-20English_20-20Final_20-20Feb_2023.pdf

²¹ Op.Cit. p. 7

²² The description below is based on the NESP and information from KIIs

education to children, most of them from ethnic minorities, in remote border areas and children can also attend education through monastic schools and, if the family can afford this, through private schools.

Out-of-school children can access alternative education, both through the MOE Non-formal Primary Education Equivalency Programme (NFPE EP) and through NFE programmes run by civil society organisations. These programmes play a key role in making education available to vulnerable children and young workers who cannot attend full-time education.

TVET is provided through several ministries, including the MOE and MOLIP as well as by NGOs and by individual employers (offering training at entry-level). A substantial number of TVET programmes are supported by international partners (e.g. JICA and ADB) though often actual implementation rests with government departments or NGOs.

Many of the TVET programmes also include activities to support young people in securing employment, e.g. job placement and job fairs and some offer life skills training along with the technical and vocational training. Many of the courses target traditional crafts, such as carpentry, masonry, tailoring, hair dressing, motor vehicle repairs etc. but other courses focus on some of Myanmar's growth sectors, such as the Department of TVET run hospitality training centre in Mandalay.

Tertiary education is available through 171 higher education institutions (colleges, degree colleges and universities), overseen by eight different ministries.

As such, there is no shortage of programmes, projects and schools in Myanmar and certainly not of organisations working to provide the different types of education. Challenges do remain, however. Notably in relation to ensuring equal access (also in remote areas and for disadvantaged children and youth) as discussed elsewhere in this report.

Moreover, the sheer number of organisations involved inherently complicates coordination and oversight and increases the risk of inconsistent legislation, programmatic approaches etc. This is even more critical from the point of view of ensuring that education programmes (and not least TVET programmes) are in sink with national economic development priorities, investment policies, small enterprise development policies etc. A detailed mapping and analysis of the overall links and consistency of education and economic policies and programmes is beyond the scope this study, but may be useful to undertake as a follow-up.

Ensuring that all children and young people receive quality education in such a complex environment will, *all other things being equal*, be more complicated and demanding and the NESP is therefore a crucial strategy towards ensuring that there is equality in access and quality of education and TVET.

4.2. Current programmes and projects

Organisation type	Main focus	Key lessons
Government programmes	The Government is recognised as the key duty bearer for youth empowerment, notably through education and training programmes. Education services are provided by a number of government agencies, with the MOE	The NESP is a key document for ensuring coordination and consistency when multiple partners provide education services. The multiple partners also adds to youth empowerment, through providing different forms of

	<p>naturally being the largest provider. MOE provides primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as TVET through the Department of TVET. However, the field is wide and sector ministries (such as the Ministry of Agriculture) provide sector specific training and education programmes. Moreover, other ministries, such as Ministry of Border Affairs provides education programmes in specific geographical areas (e.g. border areas), targeting specific groups of children and young people. MOLIP is responsible for the National Skills Qualifications Framework.</p> <p>MOLIP is also responsible for management of labour migration in Myanmar and to/from other countries, including empowering young people with knowledge that will allow them to make sound decisions when they migrate for work.</p>	<p>education relevant in different contexts and generally KIs and young people interviewed for the study did not question education provision through multiple channels. Rather, those interviewed are concerned with ensuring the right content of education and ensuring that education is accessible to all young people, including TVET for those below the age of 18 years.</p> <p>Ensuring that primary school leavers can proceed to TVET education streams is high priority to protect vulnerable youth from hazardous child labour and looking more closely at systems and experiences from other ASEAN countries, where TVET is integrated into secondary education, may be a useful exercise.</p>
Employer/industry association initiatives	Industry associations and employers' organisations are involved in sector specific initiatives to promote education and training in collaboration with the Government. The initiatives are aimed at ensuring a stable, well-qualified work force, especially in growth industries.	The industry/employer led initiatives are able to pilot approaches that are not widely recognised or used in Myanmar yet, e.g. job placements through the mobilisation of their membership.
Private sector initiatives by individual businesses	A number of individual businesses, notably in garments and hotels and tourism, run in-house training programmes that target new staff members. In hotel and tourism, this typically means those above 18 years, while	A number of KIs stressed that there are positive lessons from the in-house training though it springs from a need to up-skill those who have graduated from formal education and training.

	<p>the picture is more mixed in garments as some manufacturers allow 16-18 year old workers to join their operations.</p>	<p>Generally, employers found that training in soft skills were just as important as technical training.</p> <p>Also, employers found that young people need stipends, traineeship salary or other financial incentives to enrol in training, regardless of whether employment was guaranteed after training.</p> <p>Some employers highlighted that other businesses did not run in-house training but rather employed young workers that they had themselves training – in essence “poaching” workers and saving the trouble training. This of course creates an uneven playing field for businesses.</p> <p>In-house training programmes have the advantage of knowing exactly what the business needs are and therefore, drawing on lessons from in-house trainings as and when formal TVET programmes and curricula are reviewed and revised will likely increase quality and relevance of the training offered.</p>
Civil society organisation programmes	<p>Civil society organisations play a key role in providing alternative education, including pre-vocational and vocational training to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>	<p>Civil Society run education and training can pilot innovative approaches and work with both government and private sector partners to recognise and scale up the initiatives. Moreover, CSOs often combine education with other types of support, such as awareness raising and income generation, providing holistic empowerment support. Moreover, some CSOs work in hard to reach communities, e.g. in conflict areas, reaching out to some of the most vulnerable</p>

		children and youth. As such CSO experiences are very important to not only promoting economic empowerment – but also social, cultural etc. empowerment that underpins the economic empowerment of vulnerable young people.
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5. Conclusions and recommendations

The main conclusions from this study are derived primarily from the KIIs and FGDs with stakeholders and from the discussion during the partner feed-back workshop. Conclusions in this report are kept general, focussing on issues that impact youth more generally and apply across various economic sectors. It is recognised, however, that specific groups of youth experience specific challenges and have specific opportunities and that different industries have specific characteristics, which impact their operations and challenges. Bearing that in mind, however, it is clear that there are overall, often structural issues, that impact cross the board. Moreover, it is very clear from the interviews and conversations held for this study, that stakeholders – be they young people, industry representatives, government staff, civil society representatives or international partners agree, to a very high degree, on what are the key challenges. These are summarised below, followed by recommendations from the study team.

1. Youth economic empowerment – and youth empowerment in a wider sense - is a key priority in Myanmar. There is general agreement among government department representatives, workers and employers, young people, NGOs and INGOs and international partners that youth economic empowerment is critical in at least three ways.
 - First of all, economic empowerment is high priority to young people who face difficulties finding decent work that pays well. This has multiple causes, but educational attainment is a critical factor.
 - Secondly, businesses need well trained and educated young people in order to produce efficiently. Again, education and training is at the root of the issues.
 - National economic development relies heavily on foreign investment and knowing that skilled and qualified labour is available is important to investors who intend to stay in the country in the long run and who want to provide decent work.
2. It follows, that ensuring that all children (regardless of their gender, ethnicity, where they live etc.) must have access to relevant, quality education and training. Ensuring that student are well-rounded and develop both “traditional” academic and technical skills as well as soft (or life) skills is essential. Several KIs highlighted that employing young people is challenging as they lack basic skills to organise their personal lives, critical thinking, team work competencies etc. Hence, more attention to 21st century soft skills will make young workers more attractive to employers, stimulate young people’s ability to start a business etc. This will fuel positive developments both to personal livelihoods and satisfaction and to national economic growth. Improving the quality of soft skill education is therefore a very high priority.

3. Training should also include knowledge on rights and on occupational safety and health for the protection of young workers. Protection of young workers in general is a critical strategic element in Myanmar and one that features in the NAP on child labour.
4. Currently, the education and training system does not allow young people below 18 years to enrol in TVET. This renders primary school leavers, who do not transition to secondary education very vulnerable as their only option is essentially work. While the general minimum age for employment in Myanmar is 16 years (provided primary education is completed)²³, 16-18 year old young workers are very confined in their options as they will, essentially be unskilled labourers, and excluded, in practices, from a number of work places. Hence, they are more likely to end up in the informal sector, performing work unsuitable for their age. Therefore, providing increased access to vocational training for primary school leavers is high priority.
5. The rural-urban divide is a major concern, not only in terms of education, but also in terms of available job opportunities. Expanding the labour market to rural areas (beyond agricultural work) is a key strategy for youth economic empowerment. The key economic sectors of agriculture, garment manufacturing and tourism are critical in this respect and it does matter where expansion in these sectors take place therefore. It also matters, what types of investments and economic activities dominate in the expansion. Increasing the alignment between investment policies and youth empowerment policies and cross-fertilising conversations is therefore also a priority.
6. The limited options in rural areas is one of the major drivers behind migration, both internally and cross border. Migration is accepted as a common livelihood strategy in Myanmar and may indeed be a very positive contribution at individual and household level. However, migration can be a risky affair and protection of young migrant workers from ending up in debt bonding etc. is essential. Hence, promoting safe migration, for example through pre-departure training, is an important contribution to youth economic empowerment.
7. Government is recognised as the primary duty bearer, and Government has indeed adopted the National Youth Policy accordingly. It is recognised also, that this is complex and resource demanding and therefore Government cannot be expected to deliver without cooperation by other key actors, such as workers and employers, NGOs etc.
8. There are in fact already a large number of organisations working on youth empowerment, education and TVET, migration management and information etc. in Myanmar. They coordinate to a greater or lesser extent with each other and projects and programmes are often overseen by Government departments, even when implemented by civil society partners. However, coordination and coherence in an environment of such diversity is in-built challenge and requires conscious efforts.
9. The policy framework is extensive and conducive to both specifically to coordination and to promoting the wider youth economic agenda. The main challenge will be implementation of all the well-designed policies and programmes in an environment where resources are scarce and key departments may face capacity constraints (e.g. very limited funding and staffing).
10. Young people are generally very responsible and wish to get education and develop skills in order to get good jobs to support their families. However, parent's attitudes may sometimes run counter to these aspirations. Attending education (rather than ending up in child labour) can be a challenge to young people, whose parents believe they need to work first and

²³ Children are allowed to work for up to four hours per day from the age of 14 years in certain industries but the general minimum age for full-time employment is 16 years.

educate themselves second. Changing attitudes is therefore critically important and refers back to the need for more life-/soft skills education at all levels.

Based on the conclusions above, the priority long- and short-term actions are recommended. The short-term recommendations include a number of suggested areas that could benefit from additional research, judging from the findings of this study. Recommendations are derived primarily through the interviews and discussions held with stakeholders in Myanmar, but also through desk studies of experiences from Myanmar and other countries.

Improving the quality of education, especially in relation to soft skills	
Short term	Medium- to long-term
<p>The NESP is clear on priorities for improved education and there is no need to revise policies, but it may be useful to gather, analyse and learn from experiences from the industry and CSO driven training programmes for young people, making use of the experiences in design and implementation of primary and secondary education</p> <p>In general, full implementation of the NESP, the Youth Policy and the NAP on child labour is essential</p>	<p>The labour market needs in Myanmar changes rapidly and up-grading training facilities, using new equipment (for example in TVET for garment sector occupations, on a regular basis is required. This can be costly and a clear plan, developed with concerned industries, is needed. Results from the analysis of existing training programmes need, in the medium term to translate into new teaching materials, plans etc. for implementation throughout the education system. This needs to be done under the overall framework of the NESP.</p> <p>Any initiatives to improve education for soft skills must include integration of education on labour rights (including child labour and migration) as well as occupational safety and health, especially in TVET education programmes.</p> <p>Moreover, it could be explored if the soft skills components could also be designed to increasingly encourage a local culture of entrepreneurship to increasingly allow young people to start their own business, not least in rural areas with limited employment opportunities.</p>
Ensuring full access to all education for all children, regardless of their location, ethnicity, disability status etc. and ensure that no child foregoes education on account of work	
Short term	Medium- to long-term
<p>Establish a functional Child Labour Monitoring System (see separate ILO MyPEC report on the subject)</p> <p>Further research and understand the conditions, barriers and opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to attain education and decent work in Myanmar</p>	<p>Ensure full implementation of the NESP</p> <p>Continuously monitor the education participation by children with higher level of vulnerability and ensure coordination and compatibility between education monitoring, the child protection case management system and the child labour monitoring system (to be established under the child labour NAP)</p>

Ensuring access to TVET for young people below the age of 18 years/primary school leavers	
Short term	Medium- to long-term
Undertake a specific, dedicated study on TVET options and needs for vulnerable children, mapping and analysing experiences from various sector specific and CSO initiatives Explore and analyse lessons from other ASEAN countries through comparative studies	Reforms to the TVET system and legislation to establish a regulated apprenticeship system and establish secondary education TVET options
Further integrate migration management and pre-departure information for young people with education efforts	
Short term	Medium- to long-term
Generate an overview of pre-departure information projects in Myanmar and assess the impact of these. The study could possibly also be informed by lessons from other ASEAN countries	Integrate migration information with the soft skills education programmes/curricula in primary, secondary and TVET education and training programmes
Full implementation of all relevant policies	
Short term	Medium- to long-term
Support dialogue and alignment efforts among stakeholders in different sectors and between different groups of stakeholders. This can be time consuming and therefore, efficient mechanisms are needed. This may include, for example, joint oversight of different initiatives, virtual meetings and calendar alignments.	Advocate for resource allocation to match the ambitions and priorities in key policies and plans.

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