



Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



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COVID-19 PANDEMIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

JULY 2020

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People for development



ADRA

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DISCLAIMER

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Socio-economic Impact Assessment Study was carried out in July 2020 to support the 'Vocational Education to Support IDPs and Host Communities (VESI)' project in Kachin and Northern Shan State to develop a COVID-19 reorientation training strategy. The Impact Assessment is a follow up to a Labour Market Study conducted in 2019, to reassess the relevance of trades previously identified, the status and viability of existing and potential markets, employment and self-employment opportunities in light of the pandemic. The study engaged with businesses across each key trade to understand the short, medium- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on business and the status of employment and potential opportunities to trainees, available now and in the coming months and year.

The following recommendations provide a guide to help the VESI programme prepare for current activities in the short term, as well as plan for the post COVID-19 learning environment. The goal is to make use of the opportunities that have risen during this time, instead of just providing reactive measures. The recommendations provide a guideline for training development that not only addresses short term constraints, but provides solutions to better prepare partners to address ongoing impacts from the pandemic and meet the needs of the target group in an ever-changing environment.

The proposed short-term ***Remote (off-campus) Blended Learning Model***, managed by GTHS and supported by Local Resource Persons, is summarized by the following components:

- **Remote learning centre** set up that is accessible to students, following social distancing and health and safety measures and equipped with essential tools for each subject;
- **GTHS teachers manage the learning process through recording videos** for students to follow, providing instructions to local resource persons to help facilitate learning, and providing feedback to students on practical works;
- **Local resource person is available at the centre to guide students** through the process of watching pre-recorded videos, practicing on equipment and sending videos back to the GTHS for feedback;
- **Assessments are conducted by GTHS teachers**, with the help of local resource persons at the centre, throughout the training;
- **Students in each subject will be divided into smaller batches with rotating schedules** to visit the centre, ensuring sufficient accessibility throughout the course to meet targets set up by the GTHS teachers and overseen by local resource persons;
- **Internships** can be set up directly with businesses interviewed that are offering internships currently (as per the agreed amount per business). Internships may follow after training is complete or during training to support students practical learning;
- **Job matching** could occur directly through the internships or from the list of interviewed businesses.

A long-term strategy may be developed through this process, integrating adaptive mechanisms to better prepare for future uncertainty. The blended learning approach is based on international recognition that in person training is not the only method for learning, as the long history of distance and e-learning has demonstrated. Program partners now have an opportunity to reorient programming with a long-term vision that adapts to a changing learning environment. While we cannot anticipate the future trajectory of COVID-19 and other related crisis, it is more essential than ever to bring together partners, educational institutions, government and the private sector to develop solutions that lead to sustainable employment outcomes for youth.

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Abbreviations

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency - Myanmar
AVSI	Associazione Volontari Servizio Internazionale
CERP	COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease (2019)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DTVET	Department of Technical Vocation Education and Training
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organizations
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRC	Finnish Refugee Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCA	Government Controlled Area
GTHS	Government Technical High Schools
GTI	Government Technical Institute
ICT	Information and communications technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRRC	IDP and Refugee Relief Committee
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KII	Key Informant Interview
KMSS	Karuna Myanmar Social Services
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund
MBEI	Myanmar Business Environment Index
MFI	Micro finance institution
MOBA	Ministry of Border Affairs
MOE-DVET	Ministry of Education Department for Technical Vocational Education and Training
MOLIP	Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEA	Sexual abuse and exploitation
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SMO	Sewing Machine Operation
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TVET	Technical Vocational Education Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNOCHA	United National Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
VESI	Vocational Education to Support IDPs and Host Communities in Kachin and NSS
VET	Vocational Education Training
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Background

1.1 VESI Project

A new project was developed in July 2019 by consortium partners Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Myanmar, Associazione Volontari Servizio Internazionale (AVSI) and Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) with the goal of sustainably enhancing decent work opportunities and bridging the gap between youth from IDP camps and vulnerable host communities. The 36-month project called 'Vocational Education to Support IDPs and Host Communities (VESI)' in Kachin and Northern Shan State is funded by the Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT). Partners of the program include HTOI Gender and Development Foundation (HGDF), GRIP Hands Organization, Government Technological High Schools of Lashio, Myitkyina, and Bhamo, and the Ministry of Education Department for Technical Vocational Education and Training (MoE-DVET).

The objective of the project is to empower youth from target IDP and host communities by giving them access to non-farm livelihood opportunities improved through participation in market-oriented Vocational Education Training (VET) courses and provision of support and mentoring services. To reach this objective ADRA/AVSI/FRC partners are coordinating with Government Technical High Schools (GTHS)/Polytechnic Centres in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio, building their capacity to provide quality competence based practical short-course VET matching labour market needs. A Labour Market Survey was completed in November 2019, which mapped out labour market demands and opportunities towards employment and self-employment through targeted vocational training activities. The study covered the target locations of Myitkyina, Bhamo, Lashio and Non-government Controlled Areas (NGCA), and identified the most significant sectors and trades in demand and key relevant skills that can be developed in trainings to support IDPs to obtain linkages to jobs and/or internships. Based on the recommendations of this study, the VESI project has selected the following short- courses:

- Basic Construction
- Electrical Wiring
- Motorbike Repair
- Computer & Office Administration
- Hospitality¹
- Sewing
- Handicrafts

The goal of the VESI project is to develop life-long skills, both technical and soft skills, based on labour market demands, that will contribute to the improvement of livelihoods for IDPs. Through competence based vocational training, IDPs may achieve greater self-confidence, self-reliance and resilience, thereby lifting themselves from a life of dependency and reliance on others.

¹ Hospitality was selected but dropped in June 2020 considering how severely the sector has been affected by COVID-19, with foreseen impact for the next few years. The recommendations include options for replacement.

1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

The VESI Project was on track to begin delivering trainings in early 2020, however rapid changes across the country as a result of the global Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have put activities on hold. The novel Coronavirus, technically known as SARS-CoV-2, and the disease it causes called COVID-19, is a virus that is highly transmittable through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, according to the WHO. While most healthy people will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness without need for special treatment, the disease can cause serious illness in older, higher risk categories.² From the first reported case in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China, the virus has spread at unprecedented levels across the globe, with cases reported in 213 countries and territories around the world, with a total reported 16,642,246 cases and 656,488 deaths, with 10,231,567 recovered patients (as of July 28, 2020).³ In the first few months of 2020 with the rapid increased spread of the disease to new locations, countries and states developed a range of responses to control the spread of the disease largely with the objective to flatten the curve allowing medical systems to respond, and prevent the spread of new cases through social distancing, lock downs, contact tracing and quarantining.⁴ At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19, and countries around the world are actively working to reduce the amount of new cases while equipping medical facilities with the means to treat infected patients to reduce death rates.⁵

Myanmar confirmed its first Coronavirus case in late March, and has since used aggressive quarantining, imposed a strict stay-at-home order, promoted social distancing and legal actions against those who break laws relating to containment and prevention measures.⁶ As of July 28, Myanmar has confirmed a total of 350 cases, 6 deaths, 292 recoveries and 111,425 tests conducted.⁷ In terms of cases per 1 million population, Myanmar ranks 211 out of the 215 affected countries/territories, with a total of 6 cases per 1 million and 0.1 deaths.⁸ While there was limited reported local transmission, the majority of confirmed cases were among returning migrants. Since March, more than 111,600 migrant workers have returned from Thailand, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁹

While infection case and death rates have remained low in Myanmar relative to other countries, the economy has been impacted heavily due to its reliance on international trade, investment and technology. The most significant area of impact has been on the export of simple manufactured goods, specifically in the garment sector.¹⁰ Myanmar's garment sector (textiles and clothing) employs over

² https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

⁴ <https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-covid-19-questions-mortality-origins-cause-unknowns-2020-3#how-many-people-have-actually-gotten-covid-19-2>

⁵ https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

⁶ <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/myanmar-covid-19/timeline-myanmars-government-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>

⁷ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

⁸ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

⁹ Ibid 6.

¹⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/covid-19-could-leave-myanmars-economy-in-ruins/>

700,000 workers and accounts for 25.4% of the country's exports and \$4.2 billion in export revenue (World Bank, 2018). This sector has faced shocks in both supply and demand with borders closing and a halt in exports of raw materials from China between January and March. As supplies returned to normal in April, the sector was then met a crash in demand for Myanmar garment products as European countries accounting for 70% of exports began closing nonessential retail stores and enforcing lockdowns. As a result, over 40 factories in Myanmar have closed and 25,000 workers laid off.¹¹ To help offset these economic hardships, the European Union has pledged a \$5.46 million aid package to support garment workers. The Myanmar government has further allocated \$72 million to support small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the garment and tourism sectors.¹² There is concern that the stimulus packages are far from sufficient (as a comparison, Thailand has contributed a \$76 billion package) and lacks a long-term plan to support the economy. Myanmar is largely seeking help from international partners and governments for economic relief; however, the extent of public and private sector support and investment remains uncertain.

VESI Project Consortium partners recognize this pandemic has, and will continue to have, potentially significant socio-economic impact across the country, including the project's target locations and beneficiaries. Therefore, to ensure maximal project impact the consortium partners have decided to commission a rapid assessment of the relevance and usefulness of trades that were identified by the labour market survey in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Scope of Work

To be able to make informed decisions and potential reorientation of programmatic activities, the COVID-19 Impact Assessment is designed to assess the relevance and usefulness of trades that were identified in the 2019 Labour Market Survey in the new and evolving context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study engaged with businesses across each key sector to understand the short, medium- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on business and the status and viability of existing and potential markets, employment and self-employment opportunities for beneficiaries. These results will inform the decisions on the short course reorientation and provision, as well as support services to optimize efforts and adapt vocational education to market trends and needs affected by the pandemic.

The following is a list of objectives of the COVID-19 Assessment Study:

- Engage relevant stakeholders to evaluate the social (with particular attention given to protection) and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labour markets as well as on the overall national economic situation, to assess potential short and long-term impact in their conditions and needs;
- Engage relevant stakeholders, especially employers, to understand the short, medium- and long-term impacts of COVID on the trades chosen by the consortium through the market assessment conducted last year Interview key TVET donors (i.e. SDC, EU, UNESCO) to provide an overview of anticipated impact of the COVID-19 crisis on development programmes;

¹¹ Ibid 9.

¹² Ibid 9.

- Analyze approaches and strategies taken or planned by relevant government bodies, such as the MoE and DTVET;
- Provide a comprehensive analysis of the corrective actions that other stakeholders are taking while identifying needs to redesign, reshape or reorient current training curricula in light of COVID-19 economic aftermath and implications on labour markets;
- Identify impact on employment & self-employment opportunities for TVET graduates to improve their current livelihood options following the COVID-19 epidemics;
- Update the market structure in terms of actors and institutions of relevant supply chains willing to support project activities at current time and ensure future sustainability;
- Explore changes that COVID-19 pandemic has had and is expected to have on business, reorientation of production, sectors mostly affected, price setting behaviours etc.;
- Identify what type of jobs are expected to be available in the market following the crisis that can be filled by TVET graduates, as well as what areas might require an upskilling or reskilling of TVET graduates, with specific emphasis on employment opportunities for women, IDP youth and host communities, PWD in areas of displacement and return areas;
- Identify potential impacts of COVID on women's employability, engaging with other stakeholders concurrently conducting similar studies (i.e. UN Women);
- Assess the impact to access and control of economic resources for youth, women and IDPs in NGCAs and GCAs;
- Identify diverse needs considering the varied context and support social cohesion;
- Consult with stakeholders on potential impacts of COVID-19 on various sectors, including the impact of return migration to Kachin on entry-level opportunities. Stakeholders will include: youth (female, IDP/host, vulnerable), communities (IDP/host GCA/NGCA), private sector and employer representatives (UMFCCI, Kachin confederation of small and medium enterprises), government representatives, non- governmental stakeholders (CSO, NGO, INGO);
- Evaluate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Financial Institutions and MFI programs by interviewing key players like BRAC and World Bank.

2 Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

The study was carried out across three main phases, including a combination of primary and secondary data collection methods:

Phase I: Desk research and review of all available valid secondary data and research, conducted by the World Bank, UN agencies and other key multilateral organizations in the recent period;

Phase II: Assessment of socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on labour market needs through primary data collection: Remote questionnaire/survey; Key informant interviews (KII); Focus group discussion (FGDs) with private sector stakeholders, GTHS, youth, communities, government representatives, non-governmental stakeholders, donors, previous graduates, and employer representatives through distance means.

Phase III: Data analysis and report writing of key findings and recommendations.

The study conducted primary research from stakeholders from the following target areas: Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Bhamo, Momauk, Mansi and Lashio. Focus Group Discussions were held with a total of 24 youth (8 female, 16 male) and Camp Committee Members (3 female, 1 male) to better understand the direct impacts of COVID-19 on the target group, current and anticipated future employment

prospects and participation in vocational training. Due to ongoing restrictions and safety concerns with travel from COVID-19, the study was designed to be carried out remotely, and primary data was collected via phone or internet interview. While the study did not interview youth currently in camps due to inaccessibility, the research was able to interview current IDP students at the GTHS that represent several villages and camp locations, thus capturing a wider range of information. The following Table 1 – ‘VESI COVID-19 Impact Assessment Primary Interviews’ provides a breakdown of the Interviews by location.

TABLE 1 - VESI COVID-19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT PRIMARY INTERVIEWS

Youth IDP Interviews					
Township	Camp/Village	Youth		Camp Committee	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Myitkyina	10 Mile Village	-	1	-	-
	KBC Camp	1	-	-	-
	Mang Hkin Camp	1	1	-	-
	Shata Pru	1	-	-	-
	Thar Gaya Lisu Camp	-	1	-	-
	U Byit Village	-	1	-	-
Waingmaw	Laban Village	1	-	-	-
	AG Camp	-	-	-	1
Bhamo	3 Miles/Shwe Pyi Thar	-	1	-	-
	Lisu Camp	1	-	-	-
	Mine Khaung	1	-	-	-
	Robert Camp	1	-	-	-
	Phan Khar Kone	-	-	1	-
Momauk	Eden Camp	1	-	-	-
	Kyan Khin Village	-	1	-	-
	Mai Pone RC Camp	1	-	-	-
	KBC Camp	-	-	-	1
Mansi	KBC Camp	1	-	-	1
Lashio	Mai Khaung Ward (4) IDPs	-	1	-	-
	Man Ho Kyan	1	-	-	-
	Namtu Baptist Camp	1	-	-	-
	Nat Ma Baw Da Village	1	-	-	-
	Pain Pyat Village	-	1	-	-
	RC Camp	1	-	-	-
	Yay Aoe Village	1	-	-	-
			16	8	
Total Youth = 24 / CC = 4					

Additionally, the study conducted Key Informant Interviews with a range of stakeholders, including employers, employer representatives, government, TVET providers, NGOs and MFI experts. The following table includes a list of interviews held (Table 2 - VESI COVID-19 Impact Assessment Key Informant Interviews). Primary interviews were conducted with employers and employers’ representatives from the six selected sectors from the Labour Market Study (motorbike repairing, electrical wiring, computer & office administration, basic construction, sewing and handicrafts) to assess the current labour market demands and challenges resulting from COVID-19 within each sector. The study organized interviews with the GAD, DTVET, Electrification Department and the GTHSs of Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio to assess the current school closures and plans to reopen, changes in policy and budgeting that would impact future training plans. Additionally, the study interviewed

related organizations that may have produced recent reports or can share strategic advice regarding mitigating the risks of COVID-19 and reorientation of activities.

TABLE 2 - VESI COVID-19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key Informant Interviews								
GOVT	TVET	NGO	FI/MFI	NGCA	Employer Reps	Employer (MKN)	Employer (Bhamo)	Employer (LSH & Muse)
DTVET	GHTS MKN	UN Women	MFI Expert	Camp Coordin. @Laiza	NSS Chamber of Comm. & Industry	Construction (7)	Construction (6)	Construction (4)
Dept. Electrification	GHTS Bhamo	AVSI, FRC, ADRA	MFI Expert	Htoi Gender	Kachin Sate Chamber of Comm. & Industry	Electrical Wiring (2)	Electrical Wiring (1)	Electrical Wiring (9)
	GHTS LSH	OXFAM		Grip Hand Int'l	Construction Assoc.	Motorbike Repair (3)	Motorbike Repair (4)	Motorbike Repair (7)
	GIZ TVET expert	MOE/DTVET (CVT)			Engineering Assoc.	Sewing (4)	Sewing (4)	Sewing (5)
		Aye Myittar, Bhamo Ahlin				Handicrafts (8)	Handicrafts (5)	Handicrafts (3)
		KBC				Computer (3)	Computer (3)	Computer (6)
		KMSS						
		GIZ						
		MLI						
		MPHA						
2	4	13	2	3	4	27	23	34
Total								112

2.2 Study Limitations

While the research team was able to conduct the study quite smoothly, there were some limiting factors that may have impacted the results. Due to the nature of the study as a Rapid Assessment, the goal of the research was to capture as much relevant and crucial information to support the programme within the limited timeframe and budget. The study was able to organize interviews via telephone with most stakeholders; however, it was not possible to connect with IDPs in the camps and host communities as project staff were unable to access camps via internet or phone. After consultation with local project staff, the study readjusted and chose to interview youth IDPs from camps and host communities that have already attended training and are located currently outside of the camps and easier to access. The study found it may be more informative to interview youth that are already engaged in training, to gain a sense of how their education and work/study has been impacted by COVID-19, and how this may be addressed for future trainees. Youth from the NGCA were unable to contact at this time, however the study was able to meet with an IDP Camp Coordinator from Laiza to gain insights on the situation. Conducting interviews with businesses via telephone was challenging as most businesses are currently struggling to cope with the crisis and have little time or interest to conduct interviews. Some interviews took two attempts to complete the questionnaire,

and nearly four out of 10 calls were rejected. Nevertheless, the study was able to conduct meaningful discussions with a fairly large amount of businesses, across each sector. Furthermore, some NGOs were difficult to contact due to what we expect to be a highly busy time, and many international staff are working from their home countries as a result of the Pandemic and restriction on travel. Despite these limitations, the study was able to capture highly relevant information for the VESI Programme to be able to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic, in the short, medium- and long term.

3 COVID-19 Impact & Response in Kachin and Northern Shan

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is felt to a greater degree for communities already experiencing pre-existing conditions due to conflict and lack of basic services and difficult living conditions, particularly in camps and host community sites for internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹³ According to UNOCHA, IDPs ability to protect themselves from the spread of COVID-19 is largely due to a scarcity of water to follow proper hygiene guidelines. While the majority of confirmed cases are in Yangon, there were 11 reported cases in Shan (in Muse and Kyaukme in the North) and two in Kachin State (in Mohnyin and Momauk), as displayed in the graph below: Image 1 – Reported COVID-19 Positive Cases per Township, Myanmar (June 29 2020). At the start of the pandemic, there were serious concerns over the high susceptibility to the spread of the virus in camps and displaced communities, due to overcrowding conditions, blocks on humanitarian aid, movement restrictions and a mobile internet shutdown.¹⁴ Furthermore, many displaced people have underlying medical conditions and chronic diseases, putting them at greater risk of the effects of the virus, according to Human Rights Watch. While the reported case count in camps in Kachin and Northern Shan has remained low up to July 2020, the larger effects are being felt in terms of livelihoods, migration and movement, protection and basic needs, and education, as the country was essentially put on hold during the months of the height of the pandemic.

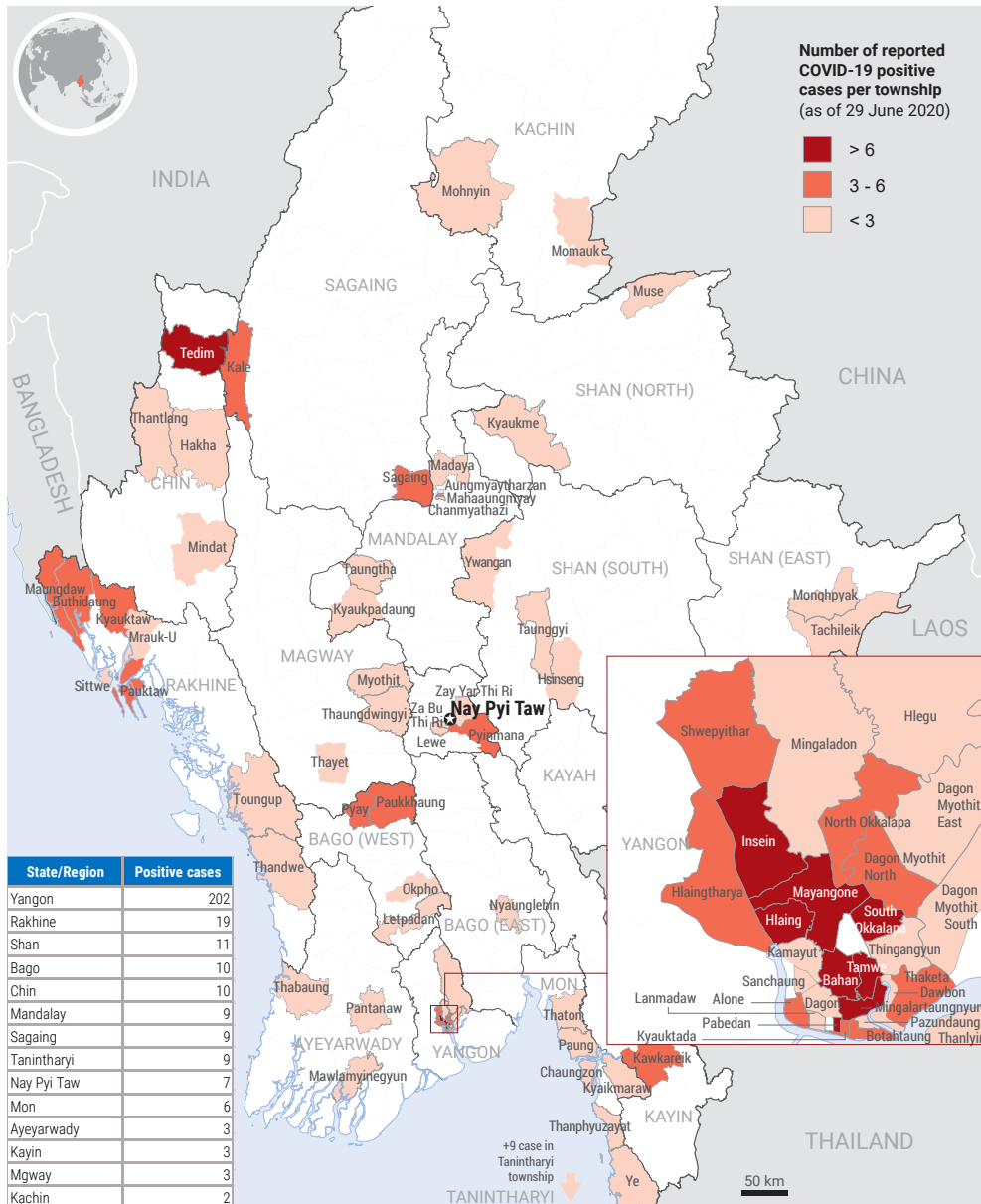
¹³ <https://www.unocha.org/story/myanmar-humanitarians-maintain-life-saving-support-internally-displaced-people-covid-19>

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch. Myanmar: Displacement Camps are COVID-19 Tinderboxes. March 30 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/30/myanmar-displacement-camps-are-covid-19-tinderboxes>.

IMAGE 1 – REPORTED COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES PER TOWNSHIP, MYANMAR (JUNE 29 2020)



MYANMAR
Confirmed COVID-19 positive cases
As of 29 June 2020 (14:00)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Creation date: 29 June 2020 Sources: Ministry of Health and Sports, as of 14:00, 20 April 2020 Feedback: ochamyanmar@un.org www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

3.1 Impact on IDPs & humanitarian response

Livelihood challenges

The slowing economic growth of the country as a result of COVID-19 has and will continue to impact businesses and individuals, in particular the most vulnerable households (HH). According to the World Bank’s Myanmar Economic Monitor (June 2020), under the baseline scenario, poverty rates are projected to increase in the short term and not return to their pre-crisis levels until FY2021/22. Under

the downside scenario, in which the GDP growth rate falls to -2.5 percent in FY2019/20, poverty rates are projected to remain above their pre-crisis level until at least FY2022/23.¹⁵ While the medium to long term economic impact is uncertain, the effects of halted travel and business operations have exposed many poor households to even greater job insecurity. As was found in the camps, many youth and other household members are engaging more in informal wage labour, such as daily labour on the farm and informal logging (transporting illegally sourced logging materials to sell along the border areas), which provides little job security. Youth have expressed their disinterest with agriculture work on the farm, but are left with no choice but to support their families on the farm or as casual labour. Efforts to uplift livelihoods and develop sustainable and decent income generating activities are significantly undermined in times of economic crisis. Many poor families are looking to fulfil basic needs, resulting in a lack of savings, leaving workers further vulnerable to income and health shocks.¹⁶ According to the World Bank, the impact of the pandemic is likely to be felt most across the following areas: Manufacturing, trade, domestic services, food security, nutrition, livelihood opportunities, agricultural marketing, food prices, access to education, as well as other socio-economic areas. The report remarks that the transportation, hospitality and tourism industries are expected to recover more slowly than other sectors even after restrictions have been lifted, due to sharp declines in travel and tourism-related earnings and ongoing precautionary behaviours. In light of these anticipated impacts, the VESI Project chose to remove the hospitality course and seek a more viable replacement (see section 5.6 Additional Course Options). The Monitor report further highlights that casual laborers, including migrant returnees, are unable to find jobs and have limited access to alternative livelihoods due to restrictions in movement in and around displacement sites. The youth interviewed in the study have also confirmed these findings.

In June, the FAO and WFP conducted a rapid assessment of COVID-19's impact on livelihoods, food security, food supply chains, prices and agriculture input flow, covering 2,100 HH, 250 retailers and 130 agriculture input traders across seven states and regions: Yangon region, Chin, Kayin, Mon, Shan, Kachin and Rakhine states. The study found that around 50% of respondents have experienced a decrease in income ranging from 20% to 50% in the past 30 days (as compared to the same period in 2019).

Migration – IDPs returning home

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis leading to border closures and loss of jobs, a total of 99,058 migrants have returned to Myanmar from March 22 to June 10, including 62,647 from Thailand, 36,280 from China and 131 from Laos, according to a June 14 Situation Report from IOM.¹⁷ Between April 16 and July 1st, 41,389 migrants (26,928 male, 14,461 female) returned via six entry points in Kachin and Northern Shan.¹⁸ According to U Zaw Zaw, Director of the Kachin government, more than 4,000 of the returnees from China are native to Kachin.¹⁹ According to a Camp Committee member of AG Camp in Waingmaw, youth returning from China were mostly sent back for the following reasons: Business has

¹⁵ The World Bank. Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of COVID-19. June 2020.

¹⁶ The World Bank. Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of COVID-19. June 2020.

¹⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/iom-myanmar-covid-19-response-situation-report-8-12-june-2020>

¹⁸ IOM COVID-19 Response Situation Report 9. July 6 2020.

¹⁹ Social-economic Impact and Response of COVID-19 Outbreak in Kachin State, Myanmar. HI.

stopped and not requiring any labour, the Chinese government has placed restrictions on travel, and parents called them to come back home. All returnees were required to quarantine in centres set up at GTHSs (such as in Bhamo), before re-entering the camps or communities. While the youth interviewed have mixed feelings about returning, the Camp Committee members interviewed believe that most youth will go back to China if the situation improves. A Camp Committee member from Phan Khar Kone Camp in Bhamo said that most youth were told by their employer that they will notify them when to come back, which implies they should still have a job available depending on the travel situation. At the moment, there are no work opportunities in and around the camps, but Camp Committees believe there may be some work opportunities if youth are to travel to nearby cities.

Gender & inclusivity

A Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak was drafted in May 2020 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group for Gender in Humanitarian action (GiHA), which provides the minimum standards for integrating gender equality into preparedness and response planning for an effective gendered response to COVID-19. The report recognizes the extent to which the COVID-19 outbreak affects women and men disproportionately, as women and girls are impacted by gender norms and pre-existing inequalities, which may be heightened during emergencies.²⁰ According to the report, as the majority of severe cases and fatalities from the virus are amongst the older populations, reductions in mobility can lead to further isolation and neglect, and older women are more likely to have lower or no pensions and live in poverty. These factors may worsen the impact of the virus on women and elderly women.

The report has uncovered several COVID-19 impacts and their additional impact on gender²¹ and for PWD:

- **Women have limited access to accurate, official information and public service announcements**, due to limited access to public spaces, and group gatherings (e.g. through safe spaces) and outreach activities. This can contribute to increased risk of infection, as well as increased stress and protection risks.
- In Myanmar, **women's representation and decision-making power in camp coordination and camp management including in camp committees or as camp leaders is limited and inadequate to advocate for women's needs**. Health crises can further prevent women and girls from equally benefiting from humanitarian action and participating in and influencing humanitarian decisions.
- **Norms dictate that women and girls are the main caretakers of the household**. This can mean giving up work to care for children out of school and/or sick household members, impacting their levels of income and heightening risk of exposure to the virus.
- **Closures of garment factories following the disruption of the importation of raw materials from China, has had a dire impact on the income of their primarily female workforce since February**. Women are in general more likely to be engaged in short-term, part-time and other precarious employment/contracts, which offer poorer social insurance and are particularly at risk in an economic downturn. This can lead to women engaging in negative coping strategies,

²⁰ Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak Myanmar. UNFPA & UNWomen. May 2020.

²¹ Ibid 24.

such as transactional sex and/or heighten their exposure to risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

- The closure of borders is also having a significant impact on livelihoods, most immediately for migrant workers returning through regular and irregular routes. **Of the irregular returnees most have been observed to be women.** Migrant returnees required to undertake quarantine in quarantine facilities may have immediate NFI needs (including sanitary materials) as well as need for information on COVID-19 prevention and protection referral pathways.
- **School closures, physical distancing and containment strategies will impact girls and boys differently, especially adolescent girls who, due to gender roles, may be expected to take on care duties thereby limiting their access to remote learning programmes.**
- **Likewise, livelihood opportunities for PWD are also limited during times of crisis.** Due to lockdowns and work restrictions, many PWD were unable to make income for over 1.5 months. According to organizations working to support PWD, their baseline job insecurity makes it all the more challenging when business start to lay off workers and close down operations.²² Some blind persons are making income by offering massages, which were closed down during the pandemic. Similarly, PWD working in shops, sewing and selling products were unable to work.
- **Social distancing and other prevention is especially challenging for PWD,** who may require regular outside support from caregivers, which can put themselves and the caregiver at risk of transmission.
- **The uncertainty of the job market and inability to support PWD may be even greater** due to the financial challenges of COVID-19 on businesses.
- **While employment may be especially challenging for PWD during crisis, self-employment opportunities can be explored.**

Specifically relating to education, the report remarks that home-based learning as a result of school closures could put girls at greater risk; 'previous experience in crisis settings show that adolescent girls are less likely than boys to return to school after a prolonged absence'.²³ School closures can also lead to more dangerous risks of a lack of supervision, such as sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA), gender-based violence (GBV) including child marriage, and risk of engaging in high-risk sexual activity potentially leading to pregnancy and contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).²⁴ According to the report, in conflict-affected states, female teachers have been subjected to sexual violence in the past, and continue to be at risk of GBV.²⁵ FRC is supporting GBV in Kachin, including Myitkyina, Waingmaw and Bhamo townships, and will leverage this expertise within the consortium to address the points mentioned above.

The Report urges that a robust gender-integrated response to strengthening the access and acceptability of the humanitarian services required to meet the distinct needs of women and girls and that their participation and leadership is paramount to an effective response and post-crisis recovery.

²² Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MLI) and Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association (MPHA)

²³ COVID-19 Addendum to the Humanitarian Response Plan (2020).

²⁴ Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak Myanmar. UNFPA & UNWomen. May 2020.

²⁵ Statement by United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Hawa Bangura, Thursday, 29 January 2015 (Gender Alert)

Education sector and response

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the MOE in collaboration with UNESCO and partners for the Education and TVET sector Coordination Group, have developed a national Response and Recovery Framework to address the crisis on all levels of the education sector. The objective of the plan is “to provide an overall framework to ensure the continuity of quality and equitable education in Myanmar during the COVID-19 pandemic in the short, medium and long-term”, including the vocational training sector and schools.²⁶ The national response and recovery plan is structured across two main chronological phases: The Response Phase (May to September 2020) and the Recovery Phase (October 2020-2021), with a third crosscutting focus on education system strengthening through crisis sensitive educational planning. The Response Phase will aim at ensuring education continuity through diverse distance modalities when education institutions are closed. The Recovery Phase will focus on planning for the effective reopening of education institutions while protecting the health and well-being of learners and of the education workforce.²⁷ The recovery phase is expected to be implemented starting in October, however planning for reopening of education institutions, and the MOE states that “some interventions that have to be implemented immediately will also have to be pursued in the mid- to longer-term...for instance, investments in distance learning should be continued and increased, notably to be prepared for future crises, which may imply the reclosing of education institutions.”

Phase 1: Response Phase (May – Sept 2020)

To address the short term effects of COVID-19 on the education sector, the MOE and partners have provided an outline for the development and provision of key strategic actions to ensure education continuity during the closure of schools, higher education institutions and TVET institutions. TVET institutions such as the GTHSs and GTIs, as well as technical training and apprenticeship programmes, were closed at the end of March 2020, across the country. This closure occurred during the examination period which caused a disruption in current students’ completion of courses. It is expected that schools will remain closed during the entirety of Phase 1. Pertaining to TVET, the DTVET will work in collaboration with heads of institutes and companies involved in alternative training and apprenticeships to help address the practical training aspects of TVET, requiring adaptive methods to deliver learning materials. According to the MOE, “the TVET sector can play a crucial role to tackle the current crisis through short training courses in professions essential for the COVID-19 response”, further suggesting that the sector must consider how the crisis will affect the labour market in the future, and to adjust to meet these demands.²⁸

In Kachin and Northern Shan, organizations and the government continue to provide protective materials to communities and learning materials to students at home. Nearly 1,000 schools were converted to quarantine facilities, which are now being reverted back to a normal state to be able to resume in person lessons by mid-July, according to the Response plan. A full outline of the Phase 1

²⁶ MOE. Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector. May 2020 – October 2021.

²⁷ Ibid 24.

²⁸ Ibid 24.

Priority Programme guidelines is provided in Appendix: Table 10 - Moe Myanmar COVID-19 National Response Recovery Plan for Education Sector (May 2020 - October 2021): Phase 1.

Phase 2: Recovery through reopening (October 2020 – 2021)

To address the medium term COVID-19 impacts, the Phase 2 plan provides a guideline for the reopening of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) facilities, Basic Education schools, Higher Education Institutions and TVET Institutions (Government Technical High Schools (GTHS) and Government Technical Institutes (GTI)). According to the MOE, a specific TVET subsector response and recovery plan has been drafted to be incorporated into the larger plan framework. The recovery phase is contingent on Phase 1; however, it is expected to include strategies for distance education that were introduced in Phase 1, which may need to be sustained if there is an ongoing threat of the pandemic (or until a vaccine is available). The MOE requests that TVET institutions follow a strict reopening sanitation protocol ‘including measures to rehabilitate and disinfect learning and training environments including hostels as well as clear guidance on hygiene and safety rules for students and teaching and non-teaching staff’. The DTNET reports that it will provide psychosocial support for students, trainees and TVET staff in areas affected by COVID- 19, and that essential services may reopen following strict hygiene and safety rules mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission.²⁹ TVET institutions are required to provide ‘an effective transition towards the resumption of face to face technical and vocational education, practical training and apprenticeship programmes for all students including marginalized students’, recognizing that closures of schools puts vulnerable students and communities at greater risk, and increased chances of drop out. A back to school campaign for the TVET sector is to be announced, with additional support for marginalized groups. Furthermore, TVET trainees are encouraged to continue alternative training and apprenticeship programmes during the recovery phase, given that safety rules are complied with at the company.

A full outline of the Phase 2 Priority Programme guidelines is provided in Appendix: MOE Phase 2 Priority Programme guideline in Appendix: Table 11 - MOE Myanmar COVID-19 National Response Recovery Plan for Education Sector (May 2020 - October 2021): Phase 2.

Camp Coordination & Operational Challenges

UNOCHA partners have provided emergency support to help address needs in IDP camps and quarantine facilities in Kachin and Northern Shan, including shelter and bed materials, masks and cash grants.³⁰ The key coordination related changes due to the pandemic include a postponing of shelter activities, fewer travel authorizations for partners due to changes in government policy and remote camp management and site monitoring. As of June 2020, there are a host of existing challenges inhibiting or delaying humanitarian and development work in conflict-affected areas in the region, including the following³¹:

- Additional security clearance requirement

²⁹ MOE. Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector. May 2020 – October 2021.

³⁰ UNOCHA. Myanmar COVID-19 Situation Report No.06. June 29 2020.

³¹ Ibid 28.

- Insecurity
- Telecommunication challenge
- Access/movement restrictions
- Closure of markets
- Stock shortage and limited supplies
- Increased material cost
- Logistic constraints
- Unclear bureaucratic process
- Restrictions on border crossing
- Lack of transportation support

Conflict and the peace process

The Myanmar military announced a ceasefire in early May 2020, although heavy fighting has ensued in areas of Rakhine and Southern Chin States. However, in other conflict areas including Kachin and Northern Shan cooperation between the government and ethnic armed groups has remained.³² Fortunately the pandemic occurred in a time with relatively low active conflict, and while the greater peace process has slowed during this time, the effects of COVID-19 could create an opportunity for discussion and collaboration between the government, Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups, according to the International Crisis Group. Towards this goal, the government has developed a special committee to lead coordination with ethnic armed groups and has engaged in discussions on how to move forward. One such positive result of this coordination is the governments' formal recognition of ethnic health providers. There is hope that if these groups work together effectively throughout the pandemic, it could result in greater trust and a long-term impact on the conflict.

3.2 Economic and business impact, outlook & policy response

Economic outlook

The status of the larger economy, and projections, may be a measure of the best case scenario for border regions of Kachin and Northern Shan which are less prosperous. While economic growth has certainly been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank expects that the country will manage to avoid a recession (due to a strong beginning of the fiscal year, swift policy responses to the outbreak and strong containment measures resulting in relatively few reported cases).³³ However, the country is expected to face serious limitations to growth in the medium term. According to the World Bank's June 2020 Economic Monitor, Myanmar's GDP growth is estimated to drop from 6.8% in FY2018/19 to 0.5% in FY2019/20. The first half of the year was met with sharp reductions in demand, disrupted value chains, and a largely paralyzed labour force due to stay at home orders for all non-essential workers.³⁴

³² International Crisis Group. Conflict, Health Cooperation and COVID-19 in Myanmar. May 19, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b161-conflict-health-cooperation-and-covid-19-myanmar>.

³³ The World Bank. Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of COVID-19. June 2020.

³⁴ Ibid 31.

According to World Bank estimates, under the baseline scenario, Myanmar's GDP growth rate is projected to rise to 7.2% in the medium term. However, this is based on assumptions that the virus is largely contained in not only Myanmar but globally, at the very least regionally. The uncertainty of the spread and containment of the virus globally and the pending status of a vaccine make it challenging to estimate the extent and timeline of the recovery process. It is clear the pandemic has negatively impacted existing progress towards poverty reduction for the most vulnerable.

Not all sectors were affected to the same degree, where wholesale and retail, tourism, manufacturing and construction sectors were hit the hardest.³⁵ Agriculture and the information and communications technology (ICT) sectors were able to remain strong through the pandemic, and similar to other parts of the world ICT has surges with the increase in telecommuting and e-commerce. Industrial production, which makes up 36% of the economy, is projected to reduce by -0.2 in FY2019/20, and agriculture (22% of the economy) is expected to suffer a minimal growth reduction of 0.7%. The long-term effects on these sectors is unclear.

Business level impact (nationwide)

The Asia Foundation carried out a nationwide telephone survey of 750 businesses between April 28 and May 10, 2020 to assess the impact of the pandemic on businesses' productivity, workforce, access to finance, and government policies.³⁶ The following key findings reflect the business level impact of COVID-19 as of May 2020³⁷:

- Twenty-nine percent of businesses had completely closed at the time of the survey and 36% were running but with reduced operations;
- Profitability of enterprises declined, with only 22% reporting profitability compared to 55% in the MBEI 2020 survey;
- Fifty percent of enterprises report business survival at moderate or high risk; with garments and textiles and accommodation at the greatest risk;
- Ninety-two percent of businesses report lower sales due to COVID-19, with 74% facing sharp declines of more than half of sales;
- An average of 16% of employees had been laid off due to COVID-19;
- Most businesses were not aware of the government support programs for enterprises impacted by COVID-19.

The majority of businesses have closed or reduced operations due to COVID-19, due to concerns about safety of the business and employees (over 70% of businesses), a lack of customers (around 68%), insufficient cash flow to maintain current level of capital investment (over 45%), shortage of supplies (45%), followed by orders to close, employees refusing to come to work, and other reasons related and unrelated to COVID-19.³⁸ Steep declines in sales have put many businesses at risk of collapse, across manufacturing, wholesale and retail, transportation and storage, accommodation and food and

³⁵Ibid 31.

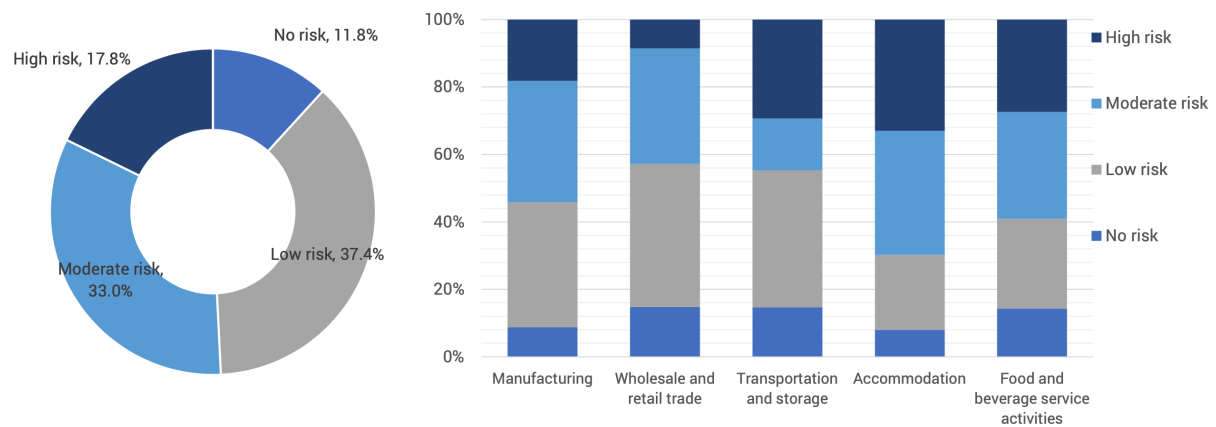
³⁶ The Asia Foundation. Myanmar Business Environment Index (MBEI) – COVID-19 Impact on Businesses. May 29, 2020.

³⁷ Ibid 34.

³⁸ Ibid 34.

beverage sectors. The following graphic demonstrates businesses' perceptions about the risk that COVID-19 poses to the survival of their business, according to the report:

FIGURE 1 - COVID-19 INDUCED RISK TO BUSINESS SURVIVAL BY INDUSTRY (MBEI SURVEY RESULTS)



Furthermore, businesses reported laying off 16% of employees, mostly 'rank-and-file' employees (non-executive, non-managerial, lower level). The sectors with the highest cut backs include transportation and storage, food and beverage, and manufacturing. Since the survey was conducted in May there have been ongoing reports of continued layoffs, especially in the garment sector which was hit especially hard due to disruptions in the supply chain and factory closures due to containment measures. While measures were put in place by the government to support businesses to weather the crisis, very few businesses are aware of and have benefitted from this. Only 2.6% of businesses has applied (and are waiting for the result) for an emergency loan set up for SMEs, textile and tourism industries, and 6% had either applied and were rejected or tried to apply but found the process too difficult. In total, less than 1% of businesses reported having received a loan, and the remaining have never heard of it or did not apply. The Study recommends that the government and private banks find ways to offer suitable loan solutions that address the business needs of having operating capital to overcome COVID-19, or other similar crisis (if relevant in the future), and encourages businesses and banks to actively seek an agreement to restructure loan interest and principal payments.³⁹

The present COVID-19 impact assessment has interviewed a sample of businesses in Kachin and Northern Shan state using a similar style survey to assess the localized impact on business in the short, medium- and long-term across the key sectors identified for training purposes: Construction and electrical wiring, motorbike repair, sewing, handicrafts, and computer. These results can be found in Section 5 'Labour Market & Employer Review by Training Sector'.

Policy responses & relief

The government has taken measures to help reduce the impact of the pandemic on the macroeconomy, businesses and households across the country. In addition to the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP), a COVID-19 fund was set up with an initial capitalization of USD 67 million

³⁹ The Asia Foundation. Myanmar Business Environment Index (MBEI) – COVID-19 Impact on Businesses. May 29, 2020.

(equivalent to 1% of the country's GDP).⁴⁰ The fund has offered loans at a reduced 1% annual IR to the heaviest hit sectors including garment producers, manufacturing, hotels and tourism providers. The CERP was established in late April 2020 to offer relief through tax cuts, credit for businesses, food support, cash transfers (to HH), and additional policies to bolster trade and investment. According to KPMG, the efficacy of the plan could be improved through ensuring flexibility to spend what is committed, extending support to smaller enterprises and ensuring that all households in Myanmar can benefit from transfers.⁴¹

Employment related measures:

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP) has announced that factories will be allowed to open after inspections that are to take place from April 20 to April 30, however priority will be given to essential production services such as pharmaceutical factories, foodstuff factories, and factories with more than a thousand workers.⁴²

Relief for borrowings of entities and individuals:

The Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry (MoPFI) announced in March that SMEs, hotel and tourism, and CMP (Cutting, Making, Packaging) companies will be able to apply for loans with a 1% interest rate for a period of 1 year.⁴³ These loans are being disbursed from a relief fund of 100 billion MMK, with 50 billion MMK drawn from the country's revolving fund and 50 billion MMK drawn from the social welfare fund. Application can now be submitted online. It will also guarantee 50% of any new loans made by banks to enterprises not beneficiaries of the low cost fund for working capital.⁴⁴

The Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank ("MADB") under the MoPFI is offering agricultural, rural development, and livestock loans at reduced rates approximately 1% to 1.5% lower.

The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has announced it will allow banks to restructure and reschedule MSME loans that regularly pay interest and principal for a longer period no more than three years.

Emergency response funding:

The World Bank has pledged a loan of USD 50 million for the Myanmar COVID-19 Emergency Response Project, aimed to support prevention operations and healthcare facilities.

The Livelihood and Food Security Fund (LIFT) has provided significant emergency response funding and through its partners has continued to support Myanmar's vulnerable communities throughout the crisis. At the start of the pandemic, LIFT quickly mobilised 30 existing implementing partners to provide assistance where it was needed most, recognizing that stricter measures to prevent the spread of the virus would likely result in a loss of livelihoods and income and increased insecurity, especially for the most vulnerable.⁴⁵ In March, LIFT helped its partners to restructure their

⁴⁰ <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/myanmar-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html>.

⁴¹ Ibid 36.

⁴² Ibid 36.

⁴³ Ibid 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid 36.

⁴⁵ <https://www.lift-fund.org/news/lift-and-partners-frontline-covid-19-response>.

programmes, reallocating USD 447,000 of existing budgets to provide emergency support to internal and international migrants in Myanmar. The Fund received an additional USD 3 million to help improve Myanmar's response to the crisis through its partners across the country.⁴⁶ In April, LIFT announced a grant of USD 3 million under the financial inclusion (capital market) programme, to increase liquidity through MFIs, supporting up to 600,000 households and small businesses.⁴⁷ An additional USD 1.5 million was pledged to support key civil society partners in the COVID-19 response to support migrant returnees, the general public and specific marginalized groups, internally displaced people and their host communities, benefiting more than 1.5 million people.⁴⁸ An additional funding of USD 15.8 million was announced in April to benefit 5.9 million people through a front-line response by partners, focusing on the most vulnerable: Migrants, the elderly, IDPs, pregnant women and those with children under the age of two.⁴⁹ In May, LIFT and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Department of Social Welfare (DWS) announced USD 9 million in social protection payments to mothers, pregnant women and social pension beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁰

Additionally, the European Union (EU) has created a EURO 5 million (7.9 billion MMK) emergency cash fund to support garment workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19.⁵¹ The Myan Ku ("Quick Assistance") Fund will disburse cash transfers through Wave Money directly to the workers to help them through this crisis, offering three different kinds of support:

- 1) Cash transfers of an expected average of 75,000 MMK monthly for one to three months for 30,000 to up to 80,000 workers in crisis who lost their jobs or face eviction from their homes;
- 2) Cash transfers of 125,000 MMK for workers whose contracts were illegally terminated;
- 3) Cash transfers to workers in Small and Medium Enterprises that agree to retain workers and continue cash or in-kind payments (accommodation, meals).

Status of trade & key investments

As the largest trading partner and source of accumulative Foreign Direct Investment in Myanmar, China has a vital role to play in Myanmar's economy. In a recent interview with the Myanmar Times, China's Ambassador to Myanmar, Chen Hai, claims China will support Myanmar economically and continue its infrastructure push in the country despite the setback caused by COVID-19.⁵² The Foreign Ministry announced plans to provide USD \$6.78 million to Myanmar for 22 projects under the Beijing-led initiative Mekong-Lancang Cooperation.

⁴⁶ <https://www.lift-fund.org/news/lift-provides-immediate-support-migrants-during-covid-19-crisis>.

⁴⁷ <https://www.lift-fund.org/news/lift-increasing-financial-resilience-during-covid-19>.

⁴⁸ <https://www.lift-fund.org/news/lift-supports-myanmar%E2%80%99s-civil-society-covid-19-preparedness>.

⁴⁹ <https://www.lift-fund.org/node/6352>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.lift-fund.org/news/lift-and-dsw-announce-usd9-million-covid-19-cash-support-mothers-pregnant-women-and-social>.

⁵¹ Delegation of the European Union to Myanmar. April 8 2020. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/myanmar-burma/77355/covid-19-rapid-response-eu-creates-%E2%82%AC5-million-emergency-fund-myanmar-garment-workers_en?fbclid=IwAR0VAMCieyHrxPyrlQocszhGNMjKJzSxkDzByU0caeX8XaGy3n2DP7bL2w.

⁵² The Myanmar Times. China committed to investing in Myanmar despite COVID-19 pandemic: Ambassador. March 30 2020. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/china-committed-investing-myanmar-despite-covid-19-pandemic-ambassador.html>.

The Ministry of Commerce confirmed in March that goods are flowing across the border at Muse trade gate, with trade volumes reaching US\$8 to \$10 million per day. The Ambassador states that China seeks to “coordinate negotiations between workers, companies and the government with an aim to promote mutual understanding so that all three parties can overcome the difficulties at this time. When asked if he expects Chinese investment to slow down in Myanmar due to the economic impact of COVID-19, the Ambassador “hopes projects that are part of the economic corridor can move on to the implementation phase from planning. But projects requiring exchanges between technical staff may be impacted. On the whole, Chinese investments in Myanmar will continue”.⁵³

4 Impact Group Findings

To assess the impact of COVID-19 on the target group directly, including employability prospects and participation in vocational training, the study interviewed a sample of youth IDPs from each target location. Originally, the study anticipated interviewing youth in the camps, however due to an inability to get in contact with the camps, IDPs that are currently taking courses at the GTHS (prior to COVID-19) were interviewed. Twenty-four youth IDPs were interviewed, from the following locations: Myitkyina, Waingmaw, MoMauk, Mansi, Bhamo and Lashio. Eleven of the youth are in the GTHS computer course, seven in electrical wiring and six in motorbike repair.

Youth were asked a series of questions pertaining to the impacts of COVID on their livelihoods, movement, family situation, employability and opportunities, and educational challenges.

In terms of youth’s perspective of the impact on **livelihoods and income generation activities**, there have been many challenges to working and moving around. Youth in Myitkyina state that it is not possible to do any business, jobs have been largely postponed since the start of the outbreak and they are required to stay at home and cannot go outside unless it is essential. Families have no income at this stage and are depending on World Food Programme (WFP) support. Some families have access to farmland to grow crops, but do not have any extra income for health or accidentals. Similarly, in Waingmaw, Bhamo and MoMauk the youth respondents remark that jobs are put on hold and travel restricted, leaving most families to rely on WFP support. However, in Mansi youth claim that after being restricted to stay inside, everything seems to be normal again, but that families are still receiving support from WFP. Youth in Lashio add that electricity has been scarce and jobs difficult to find, however some families with home-based businesses have been able to continue working. One family with a noodle shop was able to sustain itself through take away orders, but business was significantly reduced. Families with land are unable to do anything until the monsoon season hits, and feel they have a better chance of sustaining themselves outside of WFP support in comparison to families without land access.

In terms of **employment**, the majority of youth IDPs are currently unemployed and unable to search for work due to travel restrictions and containment measures. Some youth returned home to work on

⁵³ The Myanmar Times. China committed to investing in Myanmar despite COVID-19 pandemic: Ambassador. March 30 2020. <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/china-committed-investing-myanmar-despite-covid-19-pandemic-ambassador.html>.

the farm as a result of the travel and employment situation. Of the youth that are unemployed, most are not engaged in any activities at the moment. Youth were asked what type of jobs are available at present. In Myitkyina, farming of sesame and corn and electrical repair are options that youth see for work. One youth started driving trucks and building fences in the village but is unable to continue due to travel restrictions. Similarly, in Waingmaw and Bhamo farming and daily wage labour are available to youth. Aside from farming, short term work as a salesperson is a current option in MoMauk, according to youth. In Lashio there is available work in daily wage labour on farms growing tea, corn and peanuts. As most jobs available are short term labour or on-farm activities for the family, most youth see this work as temporary, until the effects of the pandemic subside.

There are some **interesting new opportunities** that have emerged during the pandemic for youth and people living in camps and host communities. Due to market closures, IDPs, in particular women, have started to sell products through online platforms such as Facebook and Viber. Most products sold are cosmetics and clothing (resale) and food items. According to the Camp Committee from Bhamo (Robert Camp), an estimated five to 10 women within each of the four camps are selling products through online platforms. It appears as if online shopping businesses have picked up during this time, however it is unclear if this will continue once markets reopen.

Regarding **movement**, youth IDPs report that some youth that were working in China returned home, and were required to quarantine. One youth reports that most are coming back illegally so employers from Muse are hiding them. The youth interviewed are unsure if youth will return to China after restrictions are lifted. They do feel that most youth will struggle to find a job locally for a while after the pandemic, and are uninterested in farming.

The study asked the youth IDPs if they are still interested in participating in a vocational training program, of which 83% replied 'Yes' (19 students), 13% 'Unsure' (3), and 4% 'No', because they are volunteer teaching in the camp at the moment (1). These youth are eager to return to classes because they find it very helpful and want a chance to learn skills needed for employment. The greatest challenges that youth feel they will face in participating in training once schools reopen is needing to attend to family matters, in particular working to support the family during the difficult time. One student remarks that transportation may be difficult as their village is far from Lashio. Of the students that have completed training prior to COVID-19, some already have an internship, or plans to apply for a job or internship. One student is planning to save money to establish their own workshop once the training is complete. A few training graduates have no plans to apply for employment at the moment.

Regarding **employment after COVID-19** restrictions are lifted, the youth interviewed foresee many challenges. Youth believe it will be difficult to find a job because people are afraid of COVID-19, and jobs are rare and employers are not hiring. A computer student fears that their basic computer skills are not enough to get them a job. Another student needs equipment to start up a small business. Overall, youth are uncertain of what the future holds in terms of employment.

Additionally, youth provided some **recommendations to improve training after the COVID-19 crisis**. Largely, they would like to see more practical face-to-face learning over online learning and more trainers. One youth is looking forward to the internship program organized by ADRA, and feels the training is very helpful and sufficient. Students in the computer courses feel the lessons can be boring since new students with no prior skills are trained alongside those with some skills, and suggests that

training be classified by skills level to be more effective. The motorbike repair training is only repairing motorbike engines with 110 or 125 CC engine power, which is not enough to work at a workshop or establish an independent small shop. A few youth remark that the trainings are quite basic, and more lessons could be added to help them to meet employers' demands.

The study interviewed a Camp Coordinator at IDP and Refugee Relief Committee (IRRC) in Laiza to assess **the current situation for IDPs living in the Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA)**. Migrating to China for work is common amongst most households in Laiza, however most of these migrants have now returned. Large farms in China hiring migrant workers have struggled with the pandemic, leaving crops in the field unable to harvest and sending workers home. According to the Coordinator, currently 90% of youth in the area are unemployed. Typically, most youth from Laiza end up paying low-skilled, low-paid jobs in China or on Chinese owned farms near the camp. Currently, most households are relying on food support from World Food Programme (WFP), Health Poverty Action (HPA) and Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS). Some households report using negative coping strategies such as selling assets and spending savings.

5 Labour Market & Employer Review by Training Sector

5.1 Status of Business in Kachin and Northern Shan

The study conducted phone-based interviews with an array of businesses in Kachin and Northern Shan from the targeted sectors for vocational training. A total of 84 businesses were interviewed across the construction and wiring, motorbike repairing, sewing, handicrafts and computer sectors. The study was able to arrange interviews with businesses from the following sectors/trades: Construction (17) and construction/electrical wiring (12), motorbike repair (14), sewing (13), handicrafts (16) and computer (12). The following table 3 includes the sample of businesses interviewed by sector and target location, against the estimated total number of businesses in each sector and location:

TABLE 3 - BUSINESS INTERVIEWS BY SECTOR AND LOCATION⁵⁴

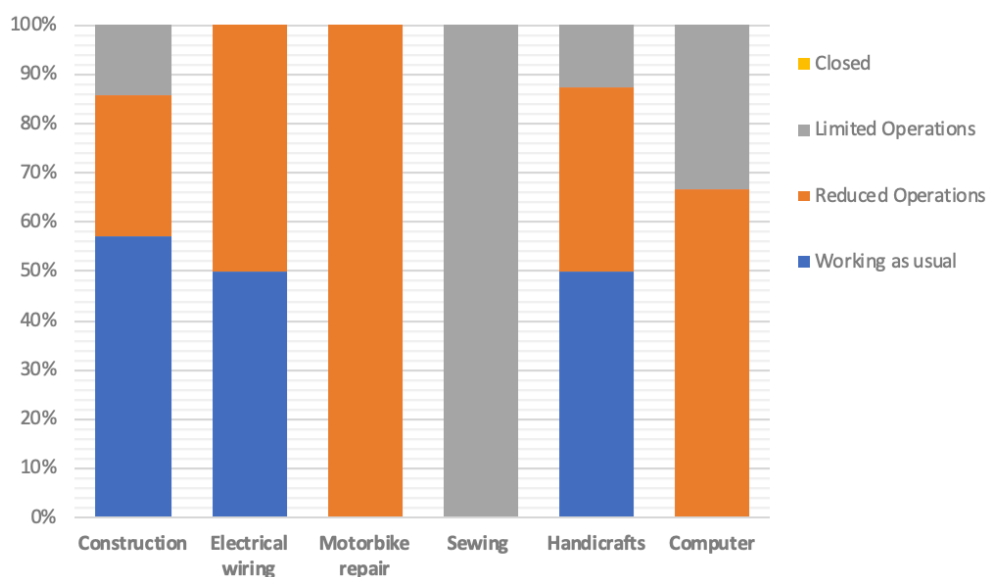
Business Interviewed by Location								
Location		Construction	Electrical Wiring	Motorbike Repair	Sewing	Handicrafts	Computer	Total sample by location
Myitkyina	Sample	7	2	3	4	8	3	27
	<i>Est. total</i>	40-50		105	117	15-20	20	-
Bhamo	Sample	6	1	4	4	5	3	23
	<i>Est. total</i>	5-10		30-50	40-50	<10	5	-
Lashio & Muse	Sample	4	9	7	5	3	6	34
	<i>Est. total</i>	150-200		150-200	150-200	40-50	40	-
Total sample by sector		17	12	14	13	16	12	84

⁵⁴ Estimated total number of businesses by sector across each location is based on discussions with private sector representatives. Actual numbers may vary. These estimates may provide a gauge for the size of the sample and scale of potential opportunities.

In terms of business level operations across all sectors and locations, 43% of businesses are working as usual, 30% running with reduced operations but open to customers, and 26% are mostly closed with sales to limited customers only, and one business is reported completely closed (as of July 2020). The majority of businesses have experienced reduced operations related to COVID-19 due to a variety of reasons including a lack of customers, shortage of supplies, insufficient cash flow to maintain current levels of employment, authority regulations, and a refusal of employees to come to work. Nearly none of the businesses are aware of, nor have received, any government support as part of the COVID-19 relief efforts.

Of the 27 businesses interviewed in Myitkyina, 33% are working as usual, 88% have reduced operations but remain open, and 78% are mostly closed with sales to limited customers, as depicted in Figure 2 - Status of Business in Myitkyina (July 2020). These figures may not be an accurate representation of businesses in the area, as the study was only able to meet with businesses that are open with working phone lines, thus not capturing businesses that are closed. However, amongst the businesses that are open in Myitkyina, some construction, electrical wiring and handicrafts related businesses are still working as usual. Sewing businesses are mostly closed with sales to limited customers. While most businesses are unsure of when they will be able to resume normal operations, a few businesses in Myitkyina were able to provide estimates. A construction business in Myitkyina believes it will resume after one to two months, two handicraft businesses feel they will be fully operational after three to six months ('U-Chat-Daw Myint Bag Sewing' and 'Shwe Phone Wai') and two after more than six months ('Glory Plus Handicraft Shop' and 'Mi Too Lay Food Enterprise'). Amongst the businesses that have reduced operations, the majority (74% across all sectors) have experienced no customers due to COVID-19, 26% have a shortage of supplies, 15% report that employees are refusing to come to work, and 7% have experienced insufficient cash flow to maintain current levels of employment and capital investment, and are concerned about the safety of their employees as a result of COVID-19.

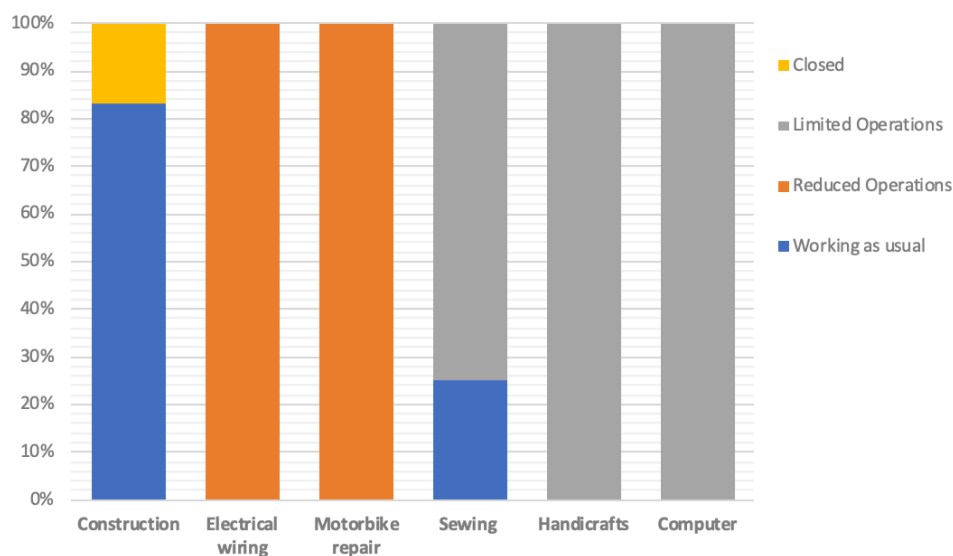
FIGURE 2 - STATUS OF BUSINESS IN MYITKYINA (JULY 2020)



Among the 23 businesses interviewed in Bhamo, 26% are working as usual, 22% are running with reduced operations, 48% are mostly closed and one business is now closed as a result of COVID-19 (Figure 3 - Status of Business in Bhamo (July 2020)). The construction businesses interviewed in

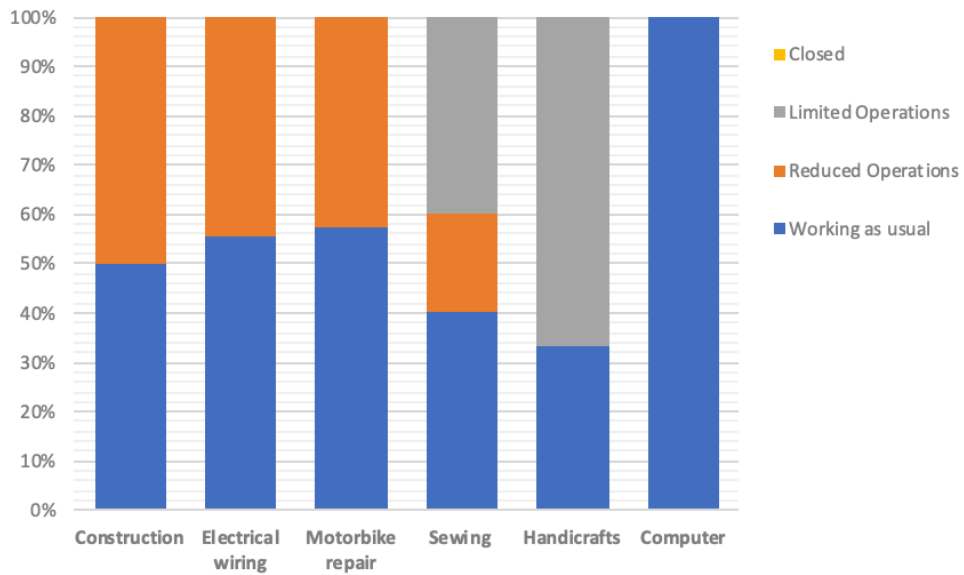
Bhamo are functioning at a higher level, with over 80% working as usual. All of the electrical wiring and motorbike repair businesses are still functioning, but with reduced operations. However, sewing handicrafts and computer related businesses are mostly closed with some limited operations (not fully closed). One construction company, 'Ma Naw Ayar', has completely closed as a result of COVID-19. Nearly all businesses interviewed do not know when business will resume, however 'K Z Construction' and 'Popular' motorbike repair shop believe it will be within one week (at the time of the survey). Regarding the reasons for not working as usual, 78% of businesses report having no customers (across all sectors), 17% insufficient cash flow to maintain previous levels of employment and capital investment (4%), and 9% have employees refusing to come to work.

FIGURE 3 - STATUS OF BUSINESS IN BHAMO (JULY 2020)



In Lashio, 62% of businesses are working as usual, 28% are running with reduced operations and 12% are mostly closed with limited sales to customers. As depicted in Figure 4 - Status of Business in Lashio/Muse (July 2020), all sectors have businesses that are working as usual ranging from over 30% of handicraft businesses to 100% of computer companies. The construction, electrical and motorbike repair businesses interviewed are doing fairly well, with nearly 50% operating as usual and 50% with some level of reduced operations. Sewing and handicraft trades have more limited operations. In terms of when businesses will be able to resume normal operations in Lashio, most construction and electrical wiring businesses anticipate returning to full operation within one to three weeks. Motorbike repair shop 'Hein Motor Cycle Repairing' believes it will be fully operational within one week (early July), 'Gold Win Motorcycle' after one to three weeks and 'Kyaw Kyar' and 'Kyaw Pyae Sone' after one to two months. Most sewing shops are unsure of when business will return, however 'K-Singh Tailor' and 'Pan Wont Mone' anticipate it will be at least six months. The handicraft businesses interviewed also believe that business will resume from three to six months from now. The majority of computer businesses in Lashio are unaware of when business operations will go back to normal, however two shops ('Sun Ing Computer and Screen Printing' and 'IDEA Printing') think it will be within one to three weeks. Amongst businesses with reduced operations due to COVID-19, 74% across all sectors in Lashio have experienced a shortage of customers, 21% were ordered to close by the government, 15% had a shortage of supplies and insufficient cash flow to maintain previous levels of employment, and 6% had employees refusing to come to work.

FIGURE 4 - STATUS OF BUSINESS IN LASHIO/MUSE (JULY 2020)



Overall, the perception of businesses in Kachin and Northern Shan regarding the risk that COVID-19 poses to the survival of their business seems more optimistic than the results of the nationwide MBEI survey (Figure 1 - COVID-19 induced risk to business survival by industry (MBEI survey results), perhaps because the current study was conducted at a later stage in the pandemic, with easing of restrictions on activities. The following graphics depict the results of businesses, in total (Figure 2), as well as across each industry (Figure 3), in comparison to Figure 1.

FIGURE 5 - COVID-19 INDUCED RISK TO BUSINESS SURVIVAL (KACHIN & N.SHAN)

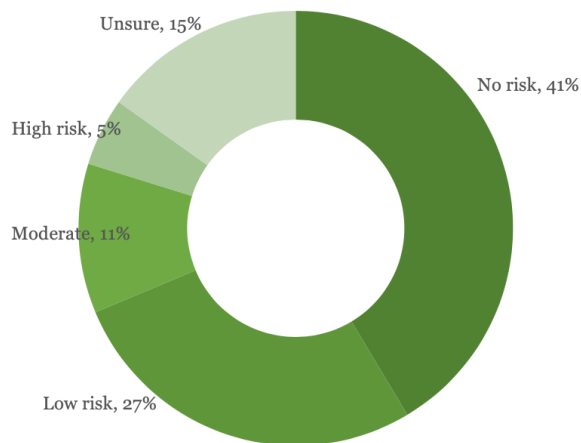
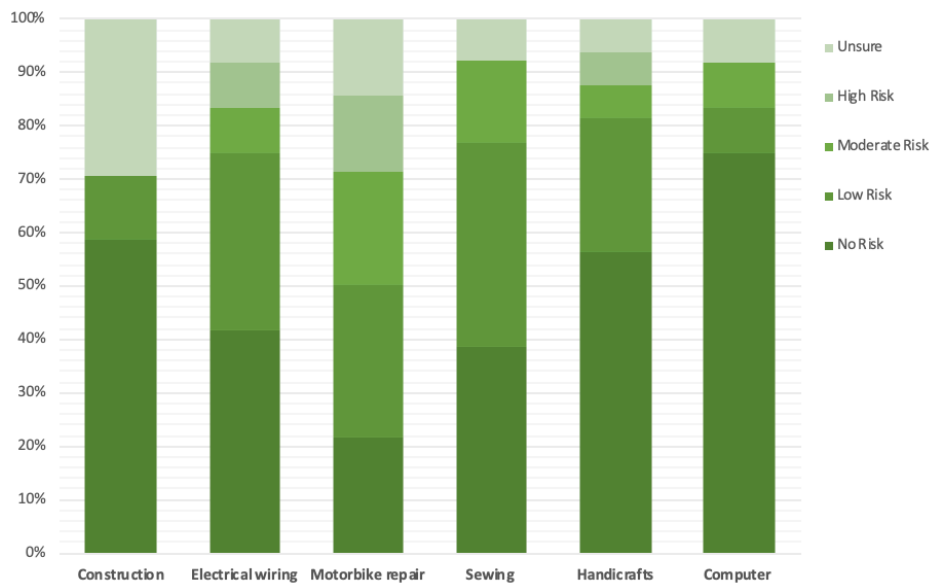


FIGURE 6 - COVID-19 INDUCED RISK TO BUSINESS SURVIVAL BY INDUSTRY (KACHIN & N.SHAN)



The following sections include a breakdown of the current labour market environment within each identified sector, across the targeted locations. The information is a compilation of data from businesses, business representatives and additional interviews with stakeholders.

5.2 Basic Construction & Electrical Wiring

The initial Labour Market Study found the construction sector to be of greatest potential in terms of labour demands and potential internship and job opportunities for trainees. As depicted in Figure 6 - COVID-19 Induced Risk to Business Survival by Industry (Kachin & N.Shan)' above, the sector suffered relatively less with little to no risk of collapse due to COVID-19, according to the 29 businesses interviewed from Kachin and Northern Shan (including electrical wiring). Despite these minimal losses, there are several factors impacting the sector throughout this challenging and unpredictable time.

Major Impacts due to COVID

The timing of COVID-19 hit right around the busiest time for the construction sector, around end of February to May, in which companies look to complete work before the rainy season begin in June. Once the monsoon hits, most outdoor projects are temporarily postponed and companies operate at 20 to 30% capacity working on indoor works such as electrical wiring, interior decoration, etc. However, companies were required to suspend operations before this time due to containment and control measures.

As of July 2020, 18 of the 29 construction and electrical wiring businesses were working as usual and 9 were running with reduced operations. The study found that the construction businesses hit hardest by the pandemic were mostly medium (30 to 50 workers) to large (50-100+) sized businesses, whereas smaller companies (fewer than 30 workers) were less affected as they are managing smaller scale projects with shorter term duration. The majority of businesses interviewed by the study are small to mid-sized, perhaps explaining the reported low losses. However, in discussions with sector representatives and key stakeholders the local construction sector was greatly affected, with some businesses reporting major losses up to USD 40,000 monthly. A few companies in Myitkyina under

government tender had to close down due to inability to cover operational expenses. In Bhamo, the construction sector is relatively smaller than Myitkyina and Lashio. Most companies have reported losses and temporary closure, including a large construction company based in Bhamo (Manchester Co. Ltd.). Manchester is tendering for a Government electrical project covering 100 villages in Bhamo, Mansi and Moemauk, which once it reopens has the potential to offer employment to 50 to 100 electricians.

Challenges faced by the sector

During this time, construction companies in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Northern Shan have faced several challenges such as a lack of cash flow to continue projects, cancelled payments from clients, and indefinite postponing of projects due to a lack of investment. Without new projects, companies lack the cash to finance procurement of materials to complete projects on schedule. Travel restrictions for workers has also put a major strain on operations in Kachin, as nearly 60% of project site workers are migrants that are unable and uninterested to return and required to quarantine for 21 days. Additionally, the price for materials has risen by 5 to 10%, and credit schemes are no longer available from suppliers (in the past ranged from two to three months term). During COVID-19, most suppliers have changes payment terms to cash on delivery. According to one of the members from the Construction Association in Kachin State, there are no banks or institutions providing loans at the moment. One construction company in Bhamo requested a loan of USD 100,000 and received only USD 10,000. Some companies resorted to selling assets to cover operational costs. As a result, the majority of construction sites (according to the Association), have had to lay off an estimated 20% of full-time workers due to an inability to pay salaries. In some cases, longer term employees were furloughed to 50% payment of the monthly salary.

A private sector expert from Bhamo estimates that construction business in Bhamo will be largely slowed down until the end of 2020. While the demand may be less in Bhamo, there are opportunities to engage in construction work in nearby towns such as Myitkyina and Muse.

Changes in hiring

Construction companies in Kachin and Northern Shan typically rely on labour from other states and regions, which is considered higher skilled than the local labour supply. Most construction companies cover the transportation costs for migrant workers to return home during the holidays. According to the Construction Association, an estimated 40 to 60% of migrant workers in Kachin and Northern Shan (80% in Bhamo) returned home in April due to COVID-19 restrictions on travel and lockdowns, uncertain of when they would return to work. Due to ongoing financial pressures resulting from the pandemic, many construction businesses are unable to pay the transportation costs to bring back migrant workers, once travel restrictions are lifted. Furthermore, companies are uncertain of the medium- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the business. A construction expert from Lashio anticipates a 40% reduction in labour demand for construction work after COVID-19 or by the end of the year. As a result, companies in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio are looking to fill labour demands locally, which presents an opportunity for new trainees to enter the sector, and greater incentives for companies to provide on the job training.

Local labour demands

According to the Construction Associations of Kachin and Northern Shan, most construction companies are looking to fill labour demands locally in the short and medium term. Companies may be more willing to provide internships and on the job training to unskilled workers, as they are in great demand for local semi-skilled labour to replace migrant workers. While the demand for labour has currently reduced by 40%, it is expected to return to normal by October to December, with hopes of full operation by 2021 (according to the Association). Currently, businesses in Myitkyina and Bhamo face greater difficulty in bringing back migrant labourers than in Lashio; travel restrictions are stricter due to confirmed COVID-19 cases in Bhamo. A Myitkyina based company is interested in hiring youth IDPs to work immediately, and is committed to continue filling gaps in labour demand with IDPs.

Job and internships available

Of the 29 construction and electrical wiring businesses interviewed, 12 are considered small (under 30 workers, 5 medium (30 to 50 workers), and 10 large (50 to 100 workers). Amongst these companies, the majority have suffered only small losses as a result of COVID-19 and only two report having to lay off workers. Although the two companies that suffered losses, report laying off 35% to 60% of their workforce due to COVID-19. Seventy-five percent of the businesses say they have no plans to lay off more workers within the next two months.

The skills most relevant now and in the future for new employees include wiring, masonry, welding (installation of gate, doors, table, chairs), plumbing, interior decoration (installation of book shelf, counter, carpeting, etc), carpentry, steel structure (installation of roof section), drawing design (drawing building designs) and site supervision (management staff, inventory, workers safety).

Twenty businesses are willing and able to provide internships in the short and medium term, and 15 are looking to hire. Additionally, the Construction Association and Engineering Society of Myitkyina (comprising over 30 businesses) and the Engineering Association of Lashio (over 20 businesses) are both willing to meet with the project team to help set up internships for trainees with their member organizations. While business owners from Bhamo are unable to provide internships, they are willing to cooperate in the future (i.e. electrification project) once business improves. The following table includes all construction and electrical wiring businesses interviewed through the study, internship and job availability and skills in demand and recommended for training.

TABLE 4 - JOB/INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES - CONSTRUCTION/ELECTRICAL WIRING

Company Information			Current/Future Opportunities		Skills
Business Name	Location	Size	Internships offered	Jobs available	Skills needed/ recommended for training
Associations					
Construction Association and Engineering Society	Myitkyina	>30 biz	Yes, negotiable		
Engineering Association	Lashio	>20 biz	Yes, negotiable		
Construction private companies					
Shwe Shan Lay	Muse	6 emp	Yes, can accept 2 ppl. for one sector	Yes, will recruit in future	Mason, welding
Ye Lin Aung	Muse	20 emp	Yes, can accept 1-2 ppl.	No	
Zero9	Lashio	10 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes	Mason, welding

Myanmar Yadanar Shwe Khit Co, Ltd	Lashio	>100 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes	Mason, welding
K Z Construction	Bhamo	25 (each site)	Yes		Mason, welding
Hein Sithar Aung Co. LTd	Bhamo	80	Cannot accept	No	Unknown
Ma Naw Ayar	Bhamo	Over 80	Cannot accept	No	Unknown
Ma Hnin Oo Wai	Bhamo	Over 100 (all part time workers)	Cannot accept	NO	Welding, Mason, Carpentry
Ma Naw SHwe San Eain	Bhamo	Over 80	Cannot accept	No	Unknown
Kaung Kin Lwin	Myitkyina	70 emp	Yes/contact with Sub-contract		Unknown
Jar Young	Myitkyina	40 emp	Yes, now and in the future	Yes	Wiring, Mason, Interior Deco, Welding
DRD Construction Co., Ltd	Myitkyina	80 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
Khant Htoo MaNaw Co,Ltd	Myitkyina	30+ emp	Yes, can accept Wiring 5 ppl. & computer 2 ppl.	Yes, 5 ppl. & computer 2 ppl.	Welding, Mason
Myanmar Maker Home Co, Ltd	Myitkyina	50 emp	Yes, can accept wiring 5 ppl. & back hoe driver	Yes, wiring 5 ppl.	Carpenter, Mason, wiring
Creative Engineering Group Co,ltd	Myitkyina	50 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
Shwe Shan Lay	Myitkyina		Yes, can accept trainees (only study)	Yes, in coming year	Unknown
Electrical Wiring private companies					
Shwe Hor Ngwe Hor Co.,L.td	Lashio	20 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
U Maung Thein Construction	Bhamo	6 emp	Yes	Yes, end of year	Wiring
Nyein Construction Materials	Bhamo	4	Can accept 1 internship position	No,	Wiring, welding
Se Hnin Lwin Pyin Co.,Ltd	Myitkyina	300-500 + 15 office	Yes, in coming year	Yes, depending on the demand	Pipe Filter, Steel Structure, wiring
Asia CM-1 Co.,Ltd	Myitkyina	>30 + 8 office	Yes,	Yes, depending on the demand	Aluminium Steel Structure
R C Construction@ decoration	Lashio		Follow up later	Yes, depending on the demand	Drawing, Site Supervision
Taw Win Nan	Lashio	60 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes, more clients	Unknown
Khin Maung Naing	Lashio	8 emp	Yes, can accept 2-3 ppl.	Yes, more clients	Wiring
Ye Win	Lashio	4 emp	Yes, can accept 3-4 ppl.	Yes, more new jobs	Wiring
Moe Kaung Kin	Lashio	10 emp	Yes, can accept 2 ppl.	Yes, in coming year	Unknown
Taw Win Nan	Lashio	60 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes, more clients	Unknown
U Saw Lay Wah	Lashio	30-100 emp	Yes, based on new projects coming in	Yes, depending on the skills for students	Mason, Welding, Plumbing, Wiring
U Khin Maung Thaw	Lashio	20 emp	Yes, can connect with Engineering Society for internship	Yes, negotiable (current shortage of labour and potential to replace migrant workers)	Mason, Carpenter, Welding,

						Wiring, Interior Deco
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5.3 Motorbike Repair

The motorbike repair industry in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Northern Shan was identified as a top opportunity for training based on the results of the Labour Market Study, however the impact of COVID-19 calls for a re-evaluation of the sector and opportunities for employment in the short, medium and long term. Travel restrictions and stay at home orders during the height of the pandemic resulted in far less travel and use of motorbikes across the region. Of the 14 businesses interviewed in the study, most reported losses and risk to the survival of the business as a result of the pandemic.

Major Impacts due to COVID

According to respondents from Myitkyina, Bhamo, and Lashio, all motorbike repair businesses were impacted by COVID-19's travel restrictions. As a result, some businesses closed for one and a half months from April to May. Shops that have reopened in mid-May face ongoing difficulties with continued low demand due to travel restrictions. Most businesses report income losses of up to two thirds from April to May. For example, a mid-sized motorbike repair shop [small (1-2 workers), medium (3-5 workers), large (6-10 workers)] in Myitkyina that has a normal daily revenue of 50,000Ks to 100,000Ks is now making 20,000Ks to 30,000Ks per day. After expenses, the shop is unable to break even. While shops are facing financial difficulty in the short term, most are hopeful that profitability will return to normal after two to three months, assuming travel restrictions are lifted.

Challenges faced by the sector

COVID-19 related road closures and travel restrictions has largely disrupted the supply chain for motorbike repair shops. As a result, the cost of materials has increased by 50%. Furthermore, shops had no customers during the height of the pandemic due to stay at home orders. Maintaining operational costs for rental space and paying workers without income for several months has put a serious strain on the bottom line for many of these small sized businesses.

There are no remarkable changes in hiring patterns or new opportunities for hiring local talent, however as detailed below there are still opportunities for youth to enter the sector through internships and direct employment/on the job training.

Job and internships available

Of the 14 motorbike repair businesses interviewed, four have suffered large losses, one small losses and one has broken even. However, eight of the businesses report earning small profits during this time. Only three businesses had to lay off employees as a result of COVID-19 related losses, and none of the companies plan to lay off more workers in the next two months.

Twelve businesses are willing and able to provide internships for (two to three people on average) in the short and medium term, and seven to eight businesses are looking to hire (two to 10 people). Internships are proposed to run for 1.5 to 2 months. The following table includes all motorbike repair businesses interviewed through the study, internship and job availability and skills in demand and recommended for training.

TABLE 5 - JOB/INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES - MOTORBIKE REPAIR

Company Information			Current/Future Opportunities		Skills
Business Name	Location	Size	Internships offered	Jobs available	Skills needed/ recommended for training
Kyaw Kyar	Lashio	3 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes	Basic repairing
Kyaw Pyae Sone	Lashio	1 emp	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Yes	Basic repairing
Star Light	Lashio	1 emp	Yes, 2 ppl.	Yes	Basic repairing
Khit Thit	Myitkyina	2 emp	Yes, 2 ppl.	Yes, 2 ppl.	Basic repairing
Cho Tu	Myitkyina	2 emp	Yes, 2 ppl.	Yes, 10 ppl.	Basic repairing
Kaung Thant	Myitkyina	3 emp	Cannot accept now		Basic repairing
Shwe Min Htut	Bhamo	4 emp	Yes, 3 ppl.		Basic repairing
Chan Thar	Kutkai	6 emp	Yes		Basic repairing
Aung Khant	Bhamo	2 emp	Cannot accept now	Maybe, in coming year	Basic repairing
Popular	Bhamo	2 emp	Cannot accept now	May be end of this year	Basic repairing
Chan Thar	Bhamo	6 emp	Yes, 2 internship	Not sure	Basic repairing
Shwe Min Htut	Bhamo	4 emp	Yes, 3 internship	Not sure at this stage	Basic repairing
Kyaw Power	Bhamo	1 emp	Yes, 1-2 ppl.	Yes, in coming year	Basic repairing
Power	Lashio	5 emp + 8 interns	Yes, 5-8 ppl.	No	Basic repairing
Gold Win Motor Cycle Repairing	Lashio	2 emp	Yes, 2 ppl.	Yes, 2 ppl.	Basic repairing
Hein Motor Cycle Repairing	Lashio	1 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Basic repairing

5.4 Sewing

The sewing and local garment industry was identified as one of the most significant sectors in demand, especially for women, based on the Labour Market Study. While the sector was similarly negatively affected by COVID-19, there remains some interesting opportunities for IDPs that have risen as an indirect result of the pandemic.

Major Impacts due to COVID

Since mid-April, all sewing/tailoring/garment shops and factories have been closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. The timing of the initial lockdowns and closures was especially challenging as it coincided with the year's largest festival, Thingyan, in which there is a surge in demand for traditional dresses. Since the festival was cancelled and people ordered to stay at home, shops suffered a big loss during this normally profitable time. The following months continued to put stress on the industry as shops remained closed, and other festivals and ceremonies cancelled. According to local experts, all businesses in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio have slowed down since the end of February, when the first positive case was discovered in Myanmar. During this time, two thirds of businesses have closed for nearly two months. The remaining one third of businesses remained open and ran operations from home. While these businesses continued operations, they suffered reductions in income up to 80%. Businesses in Lashio remained closed up to April, and have begun to resume operations in May but face limited demand and similar reduction in income (80%).

Challenges faced by the sector

Small (single person) to medium (2 to 3 workers) sized sewing businesses in Kachin and Northern Shan have suffered great short-term losses from a severe reduction in income while needing to continue

maintenance costs such as rental fees. Beyond a lack of customers, shops also faced difficulty sourcing materials as the markets had closed.

New opportunities emerging

At present, the majority of sewing businesses in the area remain closed and are not functioning. Some businesses in Myitkyina and Bhamo started producing masks in small volumes for distribution in the camps, however this was not a significant source of income. Some small garment factories in Lashio started looking for new markets in Yangon and Mandalay during the crisis. One Lashio based business that previously made school uniforms has shifted operations to make other products in demand such as car cushions. SLK garment factory in Lashio has reduced its operations by 50%, as this was no demand for Shan dress. The factory also shifted production based on demands from Yangon and Mandalay and is now making night dresses. Since the pandemic, shops and factories have started to discover new market opportunities outside of the region. A business owner from Bhamo reports that, due to travel restrictions and social distancing, the local demand for sewing (dress making) is very limited, and it is unclear as to when demand will return. The business is exploring market opportunities outside of Bhamo in Lashio, Yangon and Mandalay to sell products such as children's nursery school dress and school uniforms. While the demand for dress making is currently low, there is ongoing demand for some products such as bed sheets, pillow cases, uniforms, and children's clothing.

A garment shop owner from Lashio discussed their fears of a second wave of the virus, and ongoing reductions in the manufacturing sector in China which would negatively impact local businesses, in terms of both importing materials and exporting products. However, there are opportunities for the local garment sector to produce and sell items in the local market to meet unfulfilled demands due to disruptions in the supply chain from China, such as pillow cases, bed sheets and night dresses. UNWomen has had success with a program in Rakhine and Kayin State, training IDPs to make pillow cases and bedsheets for local hospitals. Linking producers to public procurement during the current crisis could be a great opportunity to tap into immediate demands, however the sustainability of such a model is unclear.

According to UNWomen, investing in sewing training for youth IDPs, especially those with limited movement in the camps, makes a lot of sense. The Labour Market Study found that women IDPs largely favour activities that can be done close to home, which becomes even more relevant in the current environment. An interesting opportunity has also risen as a result of restricted movement from COVID-19. During the past few months there has been a surge in the use of online shopping platforms, and some local producers switching to online sales after the markets closed. UNWomen further encourages digital training for women and IDPs, which could help support these local online sellers to develop their online marketing and sales.

Job and internships available

Of the 13 sewing businesses interviewed, all report suffering large losses due to COVID-19, but have managed to not lay off any employees during this difficult time and have no plans to lay off employees for the foreseeable future.

The skills most relevant now and in the future for new employees include sewing, handicraft creation and Sewing Machine Operation (SMO).

Six businesses are willing and able to provide internships in the short and medium term (one to four people), and four are looking to hire (two to 20 people). The following table includes all sewing businesses interviewed through the study, internship and job availability and skills in demand and recommended for training.

TABLE 6 - JOB/INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES - SEWING

Company Information			Current/Future Opportunities		Skills
Business Name	Location	Size	Internships offered	Jobs available	Skills needed/ recommended for training
Hnin Wai Wai	Bhamo	1 emp (F)	Cannot accept now (lim. space)	No	Unknown
Ma Ma Sewing Training Centre	Myitkyina	1 emp (F)	Yes, 3-4 ppl.	Yes, 3-4 ppl.	Unknown
Kyaw Oo	Myitkyina	2 emp (M1/F1)	Cannot accept now (lim. space)	No	Sewing skill
Kyal Tagon	Myitkyina	1 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Sewing skill
Daw Kar Sewing Training Centre	Myitkyina	3 emp	Yes, can accept trainees	Yes, can accept 20 trainees	Unknown
Khine Sapal	Bhamo	1 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Sewing skill
Cherry	Bhamo	1 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
Kyaw Win	Lashio	2 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
Thingaha	Lashio	4 emp	Yes, 1-2 ppl.	No	Handmade Creation Skill
K-Singh Tailor	Lashio	7 emp(M5 /F2)	Yes, 3-4 ppl.	No	Unknown
Kyal Sin Thit	Lashio	5 emp	Yes, negotiable	Yes, negotiable	Unknown
SnowWhite	Bhamo	2 emp	Yes, 1-2 ppl.	Yes, can accept 2-3 trainees	Handmade Creation Skill
Pan Wint Mone	Lashio	60 emp	Cannot accept now	Unsure	Sewing Machine Operator

5.5 Handicrafts

Handicrafts and accessories production was identified as a highly recommended livelihood activity for IDPs, especially women that are living in the camps. The Labour Market Study found that most of these women prefer to stay close to home, especially those with children, and handicrafts production allows them to generate income in a flexible and comfortable way. Popular products that can be sold in local markets include bamboo handicrafts, baskets and garment accessories. The study interviewed 11 handicraft businesses in the area, to gain an understanding of the current market potential and constraints and potential for income generation in the short and long term. The following product options were identified for the local context across each target location:

- **Myitkyina:** Amber polishing and accessories, Kachin traditional bags and small purses, small hand made products such as key chains, phone covers, and bamboo products targeted to outside markets in Yangon, Mandalay, and Thinthari Region.
- **Bhamo:** Hand-made bow hair clips, accessories or ornaments for women's wear.
- **Lashio:** Hand-made flower buttons, bamboo products, and accessories or ornaments for women's wear.

Major Impacts due to COVID

The majority of handicraft businesses interviewed have been closed since April, with no income coming in during this time. By May, businesses were up and running, however there were no customers due to ongoing COVID-19 regulations. Some businesses that are polishing amber did maintain some regular customers and were able to generate some income, however far less than the average in a normal season. Demand for handicrafts is highest in times of special events such as festivals, in which people buy specialty items and gifts.

New opportunities emerging

While typically sellers rely on the markets to facilitate sales to wholesale, retail and end consumers, some producers adjusted to market closures by selling products directly online. Most sellers are now using Facebook to market their products, and looking for opportunities to continue using digital platforms due to the uncertainty of the crisis. The businesses interviewed believe that demand will return after Thadingyut Festival in October, as well as resumed weddings, religious ceremonies and social gatherings once it is safe again.

Job and internships available

Of the 16 handicraft businesses interviewed, the majority have suffered large losses as a result of COVID-19, with a few small losses, break even and one business reporting positive profitability. Fortunately, no layoffs have occurred as a result, aside from one company, and no plans for future layoffs.

Seven businesses are willing and able to provide internships in the short and medium term (two to 10 people), and six are looking to hire (two to five people). The following table includes all handicraft businesses interviewed through the study, internship and job availability and skills in demand and recommended for training.

TABLE 7 - JOB/INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES - HANDICRAFTS

Company Information			Current/Future Opportunities		Skills
Business Name	Location	Size	Internships offered	Jobs available	Skills needed/ recommended for training
U Chat-Daw Myint Bag Sewing	Myitkyina	3 emp	Cannot accept now, if stable negotiable	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Making bags including souvenir items
Ma Naw Yadanar Amber Product Wholesale	Myitkyina	3 emp	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Polishing amber stone, and sell in the market
M Khar Pan Amber and Herbal Shop	Myitkyina	1 emp	Cannot accept now	No	same as above
Ma Archin Amber Pillow and Soap	Myitkyina	5 emp	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Yes, can accept 2-3 trainees	same as above
Aung Mangalore Embroidery	Lashio	3 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Embroidery
Glory Plus Handicraft Shop	Myitkyina	3 emp	Cannot accept now, small scale	Yes, can accept 1 training for 5 ppl., 3 trainings (plastic bag making, slipper making and crocheting)	Handicraft creation skill

Mi Too Lay Food Enterprise	Myitkyina	6 emp	Yes, 10 ppl.	Yes, 2-3 ppl after COVID	
Ko Sai Ko- Bamboo Handicraft	Myitkyina	6 emp	Yes, 5 ppl.	No	
Shwe Phone Wai	Myitkyina	2 emp		Yes, can hire in November	Unknown
Pi Sein-flower button making	Lashio	3 emp	No	No	Flower button, accessories for women dress
Jai Seng-accessories making	Lashio	3 emp	No		
Pyan Htael Bow hair clip making	Bhamo	1	Yes, can accept -3 or 4 internship	Not hiring at this moment	Bow hair-clip making
Jar Nue Aung Bow Making	Bhamo	1	Yes, can accept -3 or 4 internship	Not hiring at this moment	
Sai Rar Bow and Purse Making	Bhamo	1	Yes, can accept -3 or 4 internship	Not hiring at this moment	Ethnic bags
Sai Nue Jar Embroidery	Bhamo	1	Yes, can accept -3 or 4 internship	Not hiring at this moment	Flower button, embroidery
Seng Mun Handicraft	Bhamo	8	No	Not hiring at this moment	Ornaments for women wears

5.6 Computer & Office Administration

Computer skills and digital literacy were identified by the program as key skills for employment based on the labour market pre COVID-19. Computer and administrative skills can be transferable across several sectors, and may be even more relevant with the rise in the use technology during the pandemic to help people stay connected, continue education, engage in online marketplaces, and more.

Major Impacts due to COVID

The study interviewed computer related businesses in Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio such as desktop publishing, copying shops, design and wedding invitation shops and vinyl printing shops. Most businesses hire skilled labour in computer and desktop printing. Similar to other sectors, the majority of businesses had closed for over one month during the pandemic, and those that have reopened are continue to struggle with less customers. The majority of computer related business is linked to demand from festivals, weddings, school and other special events that require advertising, printing and copying services.

New opportunities emerging

Beyond work in computer-based businesses, there may be opportunities emerging from the pandemic that would require digital literacy (at a minimum) and basic computer skills (additionally). The study found that people are using online platforms to buy and sell consumer goods in and around the camps and communities, as a means to overcome the limitations of travel bans. If this trend continues, IDPs could be trained in digital marketing skills to further encourage them to grow businesses from home, linking with markets locally and perhaps in other cities. These skills could be combined with sewing, handicrafts and/or food production trainings.

Additionally, a Yangon based survey company has suggested that youth could be trained in data collection and data entry in excel, which can be done remotely and independently if youth have access to a computer. Skills required for this job include basic computer skills, Myanmar and English typing, and experience in data collection. A HR Manager at Myanmar Marketing Research & Development (MMRD) suggests that data collection work could be beneficial for IDPs as they are familiar with the local language and context. One industry expert suggests that with the development of the BRI project in Northern Shan will require initial feasibility and impact assessments, thus requiring data collection teams that speaks the language and understand the local context. There will be opportunities for youth to work as data collectors or surveyors on these large projects.

Job and internships available

Of the 11 computer businesses interviewed, most report large losses as a result of COVID-19, with a few businesses experiencing small losses, breaking even and one business achieving small profitability. None of the businesses have laid off employees during the crisis, with no expectation of needing to in the foreseeable future.

The skills most relevant now and in the future for new employees include basic computer skills, basic English language (and matriculation), computer servicing, computer operation, and Photoshop (advanced).

Five businesses are willing and able to provide internships in the short and medium term (two to three people), and three are looking to hire (two to three people). The following table includes all computer businesses interviewed through the study, internship and job availability and skills in demand and recommended for training.

TABLE 8 - JOB/INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES - COMPUTER

Company Information			Current/Future Opportunities		Skills
Business Name	Location	Size	Internships offered	Jobs available	Skills needed/ recommended for training
Focus	Myitkyina	12 emp	Yes, 2 ppl in September	Unknown	Computer servicing
Best	Myitkyina	10 emp	Yes, 2 ppl. (for hardware servicing)	No	Unknown
Good Friends	Bhamo	5 emp	Yes, 2 ppl. (for hardware servicing)	No	Computer servicing
Sut Ing Computer and Screen Printing	Lashio	5 emp	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Yes, 2-3 ppl.	Basic computer skills
IDEA Printing	Lashio	5 emp	Yes, if extend the business	Yes, if extend the business	Passed Matriculation, Basic English
Arrow	Lashio	7 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown
Future	Lashio	1 emp	Cannot accept now (lim. space)	No	Unknown
Nano Tech	Lashio	1 emp	Cannot accept this year, negotiable in coming year	No	Computer servicing
Neon Star	Lashio	1 emp	Cannot accept now (lim. space)	No	Unknown
Ever	Bhamo	3 emp	Cannot accept now	No	Unknown

U Htun Nyunt	Myitkyina	26 emp	Cannot accept now	Yes, depending on the skills for students	Computer Operator, Photoshop software
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5.7 Additional Course Options

Welding & Masonry

To replace the prior selected hospitality training course, the study offers a few solutions. As previously identified in the Labour Market Study, welding and masonry skills are in demand within the region. Of the businesses interviewed, 18 employers suggest that masonry, welding, wiring and plumbing skills are most relevant now and in the future for new trainees.

Typically, the construction of a building requires 30 to 40% masonry work, including building walls, partitions, flooring, marble installation, and construction of beams and support mechanisms. On average, the masonry work for the construction of a two-storey building will take around 1.5 to 2 months to complete. The average income for a semi-skilled person in masonry is around 400,000Ks over 1.5 months. While the nature of masonry work is labour intensive (i.e. requiring carrying bricks and working at higher locations), the role offers a higher income, more work days, and is in high demand.

Welding is also in high demand within the construction sector. One industry expert estimates that 20 to 30% of building construction is related to welding. As wood is expensive, iron has begun to replace most components inside building construction such as windows and frames, partitions, doors, gates, and roofing. Welding skills can also be utilized outside of the construction sector such as in the manufacturing of chairs, tables, beds, sign boards, billboards, and installation of decorations. Based on interviews with construction companies in Muse, welding is one of the highest skill needed in the construction sector for building warehouses, residential buildings and homes, and factories. The daily wage in Muse is also higher than in other townships, whereby daily wage workers earn around 30,000 Ks, compared to 15,000 Ks in Lashio, Bhamo and Myitkyina.

Online Retailer

An additional opportunity identified, geared towards self-employment, is online marketing & sales via popular platforms such as Facebook and Viber. The World Bank states that online shopping in Myanmar is emerging as a relative bright spot in the retail sector, in comparison to pre-COVID-19 (January and February 2020): Social distancing measures have spurred a 50% increase in online shopping orders, 60% increase in sales and 50% increase in online payments. Furthermore, since the start of the lockdown period, data usage has increased by 25%.⁵⁵ Despite these encouraging conditions, the e-commerce market is underdeveloped and would require building ICT skills among entrepreneurs, building up electronic payment systems and expanding digital literacy amongst sellers, according to the World Bank.

⁵⁵ The World Bank. Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of COVID-19. June 2020.

To help map this out, meetings could be held with existing sellers to better understand the process and current products that are being sold in online marketplaces. Youth in the camps and host communities could be trained in the fundamentals of setting up a mini online business, identifying products, linking with customers and carrying out deliveries. The training could incorporate marketing and branding, including taking attractive photos of products. The use of an e-commerce platform and digital payment systems may also be incorporated, as well as basic financial literacy to help youth track profits and expenses. It is suggested to test the model with a smaller pilot group in the upcoming batch, especially as online sales continue to be relevant during COVID-19. The online retailer activity may also be more accessible to PWD and females that are interested to stay close to the camps for work.

6 Government Technical High School (GTHS) Situation

The GTHSs of Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio have all been closed since April, for over two and a half months. In early May, the Principals and teachers returned to attend to administrative issues, prepare online classes and other COVID-19 measures. The schools are required to adhere to COVID-19 prevention measures set by the Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS) including class sizes with a maximum of 20 students, spacing desks six feet apart, installing plastic shields and washing stations, and informational banners around the school.

While the instructions for reopening come from the Ministry, the schools and partners have been preparing to facilitate the reopening process. According to the GTHS of Lashio, short courses organized by the Consortium will start up after regular classes have resumed, of which they do not have any new information beyond instructions to prepare prevention measures (as stated above). The Principal of Bhamo worries about the budget to cover the additional costs associated with the social distancing measures, requiring more space and materials.

Pertaining to anticipated changes in course offerings, the Principals believe there will be no issues for short courses since the student size is within the government requirement of 20 students max, and it should be easy to space students six feet apart. The biggest concern lies with the practical learning, which would require more space and challenges for teachers to demonstrate and assist students. Current courses are designed to cover 1.5 months of theory/practical and 1.5 months of internship, however with social distancing still in place it will be challenging for students to engage in internships fully. A new approach may be required for students to get work experience while practicing social distancing safety measures, at least for the short term. The challenge lies in determining what to prepare for, a short-term solution in anticipation of eased up measures, or to develop more distance learning measures to adapt to a new learning environment.

The Principals do fear that learning quality will be diminished through online methods, and encourage partners to consider reducing information that is delivered online to only the most essential content and focusing more on quality and ways to develop practical learning. The Principals were asked what they believe are the anticipated negative impacts on short courses due to COVID-19 in the short and long term, of which they responded:

Short-term impact

Internships: Due to social distancing, some employers might be less interested to host internships because they are focused on surviving the business and more workers required additional measures, space and equipment. Some employers may be hesitant to take IDPs that they associate as a high migrant population from China, with potentially greater risks of spreading the virus.

Quality of training: It is foreseen that GTHS might need to use online training, at least for the short term. Since most vocational training requires hands on training, the learning process could be undermined by moving courses online if not done so to encourage students to gain some practical learning.

More resources requirements: Social distancing requires more space, equipment, more classes (with fewer students) and consumable items (i.e. soap, sanitizer, mask, etc). These costs are expected to come from existing budgets, thus further straining the already limited resources at the GTHSs, which may take away from additional activities in the short term. GTHSs are requesting for additional outside support to provide assistance to help supplement these additional costs to be able to continue training.

Decline in student interest/availability: Students are waiting to return to continue short courses, however some students are now required to help the family on the farm and may struggle to come back until things improve. The longer it takes to reopen the less likely students will be to return.

Online (blended) training: Transitioning only essential courses and topics to online training may be the best way to bridge the learning gap during the remainder of the pandemic, until restrictions are eased, however there are limitations from students to access these trainings. Many camps lack stable electricity and internet access, which should be considered. However, the recommendations provide a solution to tackle these limitations.

FRC has recently built a digital learning curriculum and augmented reality application for students to support blended learning in a changing learning environment, which has been expedited as a result of COVID-19. The process has been approved by the DTVET and recently piloted in Kayah State.

Long-term impact

Ongoing social distancing may prevent future activities requiring larger groups of people, such as job fairs and study visits, which may affect employment matching.

Slower response from the business sector may ensue depending on the status of the economy and recovery efforts. Job recruitment may be slower for some time.

Business downsizing could further impact hiring and wages, such as less recruitment, hiring short term workers instead of long-term employees.

7 Recommendations

The study was able to capture a depth of available information and new data to help inform adaptations to the VESI program in the short and long term, in light of the new environment in which the COVID-19 pandemic has created. It is essential to first address basic needs that have emerged

during the crisis, particularly for the most vulnerable, while also planning for the recovery period and beyond. The following recommendations provide a guide to help VESI prepare for current activities in the short term, as well as plan for the post COVID-19 learning environment. The goal would be to make use of the opportunities that have risen during this time, and may continue to do so, instead of just providing reactive measures.

The following recommendations provide a guideline for training development that not only addresses short term constraints, but perhaps provides solutions to better prepare partners to address ongoing impacts from the pandemic and meet the needs of the target group in an ever-changing environment.

VESI Short-course Adapted Training Approach

Based on analysis of the current situation, VESI partners could prepare to roll out trainings that adapt to the current situation and meet the needs of youth and employers, in the short term. The greatest barrier to rolling out trainings is the closure of the GTHSs and no clear understanding of when they will reopen. GTHS teachers are also unable to provide training (in person) remotely, according to government guidelines. However, it remains essential to work through the GTHS as a training partner, and working towards building capacity through the programme. Therefore, it is recommended to develop a short-term solution that be run through the GTHS while following government COVID-19 restrictions.

Short term: Remote (off-campus) blended learning, managed by GTHS and supported by Local Resource Persons

The study interviewed each GTHS from Myitkyina, Bhamo and Lashio to help brainstorm solutions to run trainings in the current period. The most feasible solution could be to develop blended learning trainings, to be managed by the GTHS and facilitated by local resource persons at a centre outside of the GTHS. The GTHS teachers can record videos for each training, covering the essential theoretical works and guidelines for practicing hands-on. A local centre could be set up, according to COVID-19 safety measures, with separate spaces for each training (i.e. electrical wiring, motorbike repair, sewing). The centre could be established at a central community building, monastery or NGO building with available space. A local resource person could be hired to facilitate students' learning at the centre, where they can access videos produced by the GTHS teachers, and practice on equipment. The local resource person should be experienced in the trade, and able to guide students through the videos and practical work. Students can film themselves executing certain tasks (with the help of the resource person) and send back to the GTHS teachers for feedback. This model would allow students to receive practical training, while under the management of the GTHS. If schools re open, the training can be shifted back to the government building to be resumed, and students will already have a relationship with their teachers.

By using the centre, students do not need to worry about accessing internet and charging devices to stay connected. While they can access materials on their own for further study outside of the centre, all resources should be made available at the centre and overseen by the local resource person. Another significant limiting restriction that needs to be incorporated is social distancing measures. Students can access the centre in small batches of five to six people at a time (per sectioned room). Based on the geographic spread of camps outside of Lashio, it is recommended to set up two to three centres, one to two in Myitkyina (one in Waingmaw), and one centre in Bhamo. The space does not need to be large as there should be fewer than six students at a time per subject. Separate workspaces

could be set up for each training, for example as electrical wiring, motorbike repair and sewing, with equipment set up to practice and space for recording videos to be sent back to the GTHS. It is recommended to run only three trainings (per target location) at a time, and to consider reducing the batch sizes in the short term. The situation with COVID-19 has made in person training nearly impossible, however the goal would be to continue offering quality trainings with theoretical and practical components, through the GTHS. As an example, an estimated 20 students per training (60 in total) would need to be divided into 10 smaller groups of six students. If properly set up with containment measures between each workspace, the centre could hold one group per subject at a time, for a total of 18 students (6 in three groups). To complete 1.5 months of training, these groups will need to be managed by the project staff and local resource person according to a predetermined schedule rotating visits to the centre. It is estimated that a single training should take around three hours (half day), which will allow youth to continue working throughout the programme. The centre should also be located to ensure ease of travel for youth to and from, with options for group transportation.

The abovementioned approach is feasible for all GTHSs across the target locations, however there are some additional considerations specific to the context of each location, as detailed below:

Bhamo

The Principal of Bhamo GTHS is keen to develop the recommended approach and believes it is best to start short course training as soon as possible so that learning is not delayed. The Principal is interested in online training options, and feels it would be effective for teachers to pre-record their trainings and for students to send back recordings of their work for review and comment. Students would need telephones and some basic materials and equipment at the centre to use for practicing, but this should be feasible to set up with equipment from the GTHS. Since the only activities allowed at the GTHS at the moment are online training, the recommended approach could help fulfill the practical aspects of the training while also connecting students and GTHS teachers via remote learning tools. The centre can be equipped with basic equipment that the teachers suggest the students use for practice, and recording videos to send back to them. Social distancing and sanitation measures should also be in place.

Myitkyina

Similar to Bhamo, the Myitkyina GTHS could be prepared to roll out the recommended approach. The Myitkyina GTHS is already conducting off campus mobile training during the summer term, whereby teachers provide training at remote locations and bring equipment with them. As previously mentioned, this is not feasible since the government is restricting teachers from meeting with students in person. However, a similar model could be followed with the support of a local resource person to manage the centre and coordinate communication between student and teachers via video. Bringing GTHS teachers to the centre would require special permission, which is uncertain. At the very least the school can request to the Ministry to allow GTHS teachers to visit the centre once per week to check in on students, if allowed. However, the training can still be run effectively according to the model above. Camps in Myitkyina are closer to the GTHS (than Lashio for example), so it could be easier in this location to do mobile training with some check-ins (if allowed) and managed remotely. Similarly, the centre will need to be equipped by the GTHS with the most useful equipment for each training.

Lashio

In Lashio, the camps are located a bit farther from the GTHS. To ensure students have easy access to the remote centre, it might be best to establish two to three locations for practical work and organize based on where the majority of students are in each training are coming from. The GTHS of Lashio has another centre than could be used in downtown as well, that may not be under the same restrictions as the main school. It is recommended to engage further with the school to develop the off campus training model as outlined above and adapt to any special needs to youth in this area, such as a wider geographic distance.

Overall, the remote blended learning approach could become an interesting alternative in not only the short term but if there are any future circumstances that require school closures or restriction of movement. A Joint Survey conducted in April 2020 by ILO and UNESCO on TVET and Skills Development during the time of COVID-19, found that a mix of online and offline distance learning appears to be a widespread method of delivering courses and training remotely, based on findings from across the world.⁵⁶ The VESI target group may face greater difficulty in accessing stable electricity and internet in the camps and communities. Furthermore, the students will need hands on support throughout the learning process, including both online video and practical components. Through the support of local resource persons and the GHTS, it is anticipated that the program could deliver higher quality learning off campus. Additionally, the program can continue to work towards building capacity of GTHS teachers through the approach, including the use of videos and technology that will likely become more relevant throughout the future.

The ***Remote (off-campus) Blended Learning Model*** is summarized by the following components:

- **Remote learning centre** set up that is accessible to students, following social distancing and health and safety measures and equipped with essential tools for each subject;
- **GTHS teachers manage the learning process through recording videos** for students to follow, providing instructions to local resource persons to help facilitate the learning, and giving feedback to students on practical works;
- **Local resource person is available at the centre to guide students** through the process of watching pre-recorded videos, practicing on equipment and sending videos back to the GTHS for feedback;
- **Assessments are conducted by GTHS teachers**, with the help of local resource persons at the centre, throughout the training;
- **Students in each subject will be divided into smaller batches with rotating schedules** to visit the centre, ensuring sufficient accessibility throughout the course to meet targets set up by the GTHS teachers and overseen by local resource persons;
- **Internships** can be set up directly with businesses interviewed that are offering internships currently (as per the agreed amount per business). Internships may follow after training is complete or during training to support students practical learning;
- **Job matching** could occur directly through the internships or from the list of interviewed businesses.

⁵⁶ ILO-UNESCO Joint Survey on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Skills Development during the time of COVID-19. April 2020.

Long term

The abovementioned model can help deliver essential learning to youth though ongoing restrictions and limitations from the crisis. It is likely that social distancing measures will be in place for the foreseeable future, and may return in the event of secondary waves of transmission, therefore it would be advantageous to prepare courses for smaller groups of students, and still covering the most essential information. If teachers are unable to cover the number of additional courses required to cover all students, it is recommended to reduce the target size in the short term, over cutting essential course content to ensure that students are receiving adequate learning.

Recognizing a shifting environment that may persist through the future, it would be beneficial to develop learning modules that not only anticipate changes but make the most of them. For example, online retailer and digital marketing skills are identified as relevant to adapt to changes in market closures and increases in online shopping. These skills could be useful for producers that are already looking to market and sell products locally, and for new trainees interested in developing a livelihood.

VESI Short-course Course Subject Recommendations

The study recommends the following short course trainings, updated from the previous Labour Market Study recommendations. The recommended short course subjects are based on current labour market demand and job opportunities identified in the COVID-19 Impact Assessment, and include:

- Basic Construction
 - Electrical Wiring
 - Masonry
 - Welding, steel decoration
- Mechanic
 - Motorbike Repair
 - Farm machinery repair
- Computer & Office Administration
 - Basic Computer
- Sewing
 - Women’s dress/blouse, longyi & accessories
 - Household products
 - School uniforms
- Handicrafts
- Online retailer

TABLE 9 - VESI SHORT COURSE SUBJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Sector	VET Short Course (Level 1)	Self or Formal employment	Skills/topics	Location
Construction	Electrical wiring	Both	Household wiring, installation of electrical socket/light/bulb, installation of power unit for house appliance such as air-	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio

			condition, refrigerator, water heater, washing machine, etc.	
	Masonry	Both	Understand concrete mixing ratio, brick laying, finishing, quality control of construction materials such as brick, cement, sand, etc.	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
	Welding, steel decoration	Both	Installation of door, windows, main gate, decoration with steel for stair handle, etc.	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
Mechanic	Motorbike/Car Repair	Both	Car: Engine and fuel system repairs, electrical wiring, chassis repairs, air condition system repair, body and painting details, etc.	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
	Farm Machinery Repair	Self	Manual handheld tools (single engine tractor) use and repair	NGCA
Computer	Basic Computer	Employ	Word processing in Myanmar and English/ excel data entry/	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
Sewing	Women's dress/blouse, Longyi & accessories	Self	Tailoring of women's dresses, both casual and fancy, ethnic dresses (Shan and Kachin), and accessories (ornate buttons for dresses/blouses)	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
	Household products	Self	Producing household items to sell in local markets, such as bed sheets, pillow covers, aprons, and bags	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
	School uniforms	Self	Manufacturing shirts for M/F, in three sizes (small, medium and large), and a standard unisex longyi bottom	NGCA
Handicrafts	Handicrafts	Self	traditional & hand weaving, ethnic specialities, garment accessories	Myitkyina Bhamo Lashio
Online Retailer/ Digital Marketing	Online Retailer	Self	Product advertising, sales through online platforms such as Facebook	Myitkyina, Bhamo

Additional measures:

Some additional measures may be considered in adapting programs to be most effective and better prepared for the future. Many of these measures were identified in the ILO-UNESCO Joint Survey, and may be highly relevant in the context of the VESI program:

- Assess the accessibility to digital tools such as smartphones and/or computers for youth in the camps and host communities, provision of free internet and data packages for trainees, and ensure that basic infrastructure is in place (e.g. electricity).
- Assess data security when uploading data or educational resources to web spaces, as well as when sharing them with other organizations or individuals. Ensure that the use of applications and platforms does not violate students' data privacy (UNESCO).
- Introduction of online and practical training in online courses at the beginning to familiarize and prepare students for the online learning process and transition to practical learning.
- Support students to engage in the lessons, recognizing that motivation plays an important role in e-learning (as found in the Joint Survey).
- Teachers may need additional support to adapt to the new learning methods and approaches, requiring training of teachers to be flexible and practical in a new environment. ICT skills are now very important and relevant for both teachers and students. The model would require additional training and capacity building for GTHS teachers, not only in the use of online tools and video production, but in managing the remote learning process.

Inclusive and gender-integrated educational response:

Furthermore, it is important to consider the needs of the most vulnerable in developing the training models to ensure the specific needs of women and students with disabilities are also met. The following recommendations are provided from UNESCO's COVID-19 Recommendations to plan distance learning solutions⁵⁷ and UNFPA & UNWomen Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak Myanmar⁵⁸:

- **Create communities and enhance connection:** Create communities of teachers, parents and school managers to address sense of loneliness or helplessness, facilitate sharing of experience and discussion on coping strategies when facing learning difficulties (UNESCO).
- Put in place **preventative measures to minimize the risk of students dropping out of school [or training] permanently, especially among girls**, who are often at higher risk due to the increase in their care responsibilities and other factors. Advocate for equal sharing of domestic and care duties among all household members including male and female siblings (UNFPA/UNWomen).
- **Promote equal participation of girls and boys during school closures when alternative, remote learning initiatives are implemented.** Careful focus should be placed on monitoring the participation of girls in these initiatives and addressing reasons that are hindering girls' participation in coordination with other clusters where relevant (UNFPA/UNWomen).
- **Any educational facilities, including temporary/alternative ones, must have safe and sex-segregated WASH facilities** (including lighting and functioning locking mechanisms from the inside and supplies for the prevention and control of COVID-19) (UNFPA/UNWomen).
- If the location, timing, or alternate educational activities are changed, **girls and boys cannot be placed at additional risk while commuting to school (due to check-points or other accessibility challenges) nor should these changes cause a drop in attendance for girls** (due to distance or care responsibilities which may be expected at a certain time of day) (UNFPA/UNWomen).

⁵⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-10-recommendations-plan-distance-learning-solutions>.

⁵⁸ Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak Myanmar. UNFPA & UNWomen. May 2020.

8 Conclusion

The Impact Assessment provides a review of the current impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting IDPs, women, the education sector and TVET, as well as the larger economy and impact on businesses relating to the VESI short course training. While the study was limited by challenges to meet with the target group and in reaching several businesses, it was able to compile a list of current internship and prospective job opportunities for IDPs entering training. While most sectors were hit hard by the pandemic, some were affected to a higher degree including garment, hospitality, tourism and food and beverage related businesses. However, the study concludes that the trades selected by VESI remain relevant and several businesses within each area are currently able to take on interns and have labour shortages, as a result of the pandemic.

Overall, the assessment suggests a remote (off-campus) blended learning model in the short term, that meets training requirements and targets, while also building the capacity of the GTHS to manage trainings during school closures. The approach would require coordination between partners, the GTHS, local resource persons and the private sector businesses to ensure a comprehensive learning experience for youth and linkages to real employment opportunities upon completion of training. While this approach is designed to meet demands in the short term, it is not a long-term strategy and must be adapted once the GTHS reopens and normal classes can resume. However, as the timing of this is uncertain, it is recommended to develop an alternative training model that follows government safety and health guidelines while maintaining the integrity of the programme and its partnerships. A long-term strategy may be developed through this process, integrating adaptive mechanisms to better prepare for future uncertainty. The tailored recommendations may help guide VESI consortium partners to go beyond recovery and develop a proactive approach that utilizes new opportunities that may have emerged during the crisis. The blended learning approach is based on international recognition that in person training is not the only method for learning, as the long history of distance and e-learning has demonstrated.⁵⁹ The ILO-UNESCO Joint Survey suggests that blended learning should become a permanent option for learning in TVET to ensure continuity of training in situations like these [COVID-19].

Program partners now have an opportunity to reorient programming with a long term vision that adapts to a changing learning environment, instead of providing reactive measures. While we cannot anticipate the future trajectory of COVID-19 and other related crisis, it is more essential than ever to bring together partners, educational institutions, government and the private sector to develop solutions that lead to sustainable employment outcomes for youth.

⁵⁹ ILO-UNESCO Joint Survey on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Skills Development during the time of COVID-19. April 2020.

9 Appendix

TABLE 10 - MOE MYANMAR COVID-19 NATIONAL RESPONSE RECOVERY PLAN FOR EDUCATION SECTOR (MAY 2020 - OCTOBER 2021): PHASE 1

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination and Funding		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
Priority programme 1: Education continuity during TVET institutions (GTHSs and GTIs closures)					
Prioritisation of training curriculum	Identification of disciplines/training courses that can be taught via distance learning NB. Definition of distance learning options for TVET should also include reflections on TVET institutions' immediate adaptation to a changing labour market in the current crisis context)		DTVET		
	Prioritisation of disciplines/training courses that are relevant to overcome the COVID-19 crisis (health workers, logistics etc.)		DTVET		
Distance learning/training material development	Undertaking of a survey and analysis of Internet Access and related materials for e-learning online courses and trainings		DTVET (HQ) HRD and Admin		
	Development of online and offline learning materials by GTHSs and GTIs supported by the MoE (Myanmar Distance Education Program (MDEP) Web, Myanmar Distance Education Program App)		TPTC (Baelin) KMTTTI HRD DPs		
	Quality assurance of adapted Learning Materials		DTVET		
	Development of learning materials and special support mechanisms for students/trainees with special needs		DTVET		
	Development of learning materials and special support mechanisms for IDP students		DTVET		

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination and Funding		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
Distance Learning Deployment	Support to the required Internet Access and related materials based on analysis of survey results		DTVET(HQ) Budget and Buying All Schools under DTVET DPs		
	Implementation of an E-Learning Course on Management of Vocational Training Centres		With GIZ		
	Conduct online courses for students/trainees		TPTC(Baelin) KMTTTI		
	Deployment of Myanmar Distance Education Program (MDEP) Learning platform, MDEP App to distribute learning material				
	Establishment of partnerships with internet providers to zero-rate education platforms		DTVET		
	Distance support for students/trainees through two-way mobile communication		DTVET		
	Low-tech Distribution of discipline-specific learning materials in most remote TVET institutions with all learning materials uploaded		DTVET		
	No tech Hard copy distribution of all textbooks/course materials		DTVET		
Ensure admission processes continue from a distance	Development of distance admission processes for GTHSs and GTIs including online and offline options (postal		DTVET		

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination and Funding		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
	admissions, telephone hotlines, online admission)				
Priority programme 2: In-service TVET Teacher Training and Support					
Teacher/Trainer Training in Distance Learning Support	Capacity Upgrade Trainings by using ICT for Trainers and Resource Persons		TPTC(Baelin) KMTTTI HRD		
	Conduct online courses such as management, teaching methodology, life skills and other necessary technical skills for teachers and trainers by e-learning		TPTC(Baelin) KMTTTI		
Psychosocial support	Provision of PSS to teachers/trainers and non-teaching staff in affected Townships		DTVET		
Priority programme 3: Students/Trainees Health and Wellbeing					
COVID-19 Prevention	Awareness-raising on COVID-19 safety measures, health and hygiene-related life-saving measures through the provision of COVID-19 prevention guidelines in line with MoHS by all GTHS/GTI		DTVET		
Psychosocial Support	Provision of PSS to students in affected Townships		DTVET		
Priority programme 4: Communication at all levels					
Communication between students and teachers	Set up of distance communication with students/trainees through two-way mobile communication		DTVET		
Communication between GTHS/GTIs, students/trainees and staff	Establishment of communication channels at all levels to keep stakeholders informed about the current situation, provide updated information about GTHS/GTI		DTVET		

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination and Funding		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
	closures, processes being put in place, resources available, expectations around distance learning etc.				

TABLE 11 - MOE MYANMAR COVID-19 NATIONAL RESPONSE RECOVERY PLAN FOR EDUCATION SECTOR (MAY 2020 - OCTOBER 2021): PHASE 2

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
	needed. Cleaning staff should also be trained on disinfection and be equipped with personal protection equipment to the extent possible				
Wellbeing and protection of students/trainees, teachers/trainers and staff	Provision of psychosocial support for the mental wellbeing of students/trainees, teachers/trainers, staff in COVID-19 affected townships				
	Re-establishment of regular and safe delivery of essential GTHSs/GTIs-based services (WASH and health services, protection referrals and specialized services for students/trainees with disabilities)				
Priority programme 2: Smooth transition towards the resumption of face to face technical and vocational education, practical training and apprenticeship programmes for all students including marginalized students					
Assessing learning progress/skills acquisition progress	Implementation of a back to GTHSs/GTIs assessment in COVID-19 affected Townships where TVET institutions had to close down				
Restructuring of some courses/TVET curriculum	Develop and implement an accelerated version of some courses/trainings for the year 2020/21 on a case by case basis				
Prevention of dropout	Design and implement a back to school campaign for the TVET sector				
Defining a sanitary protocol for trainees and apprentices for practical training and at the workplace	Development and distribution of protocols on physical distancing and hygiene measures at the workplace.				
	Development and distribution of clear guidance monitor student/trainee and				
Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
Priority programme 1: Return to safe learning environment while ensuring the wellbeing and protection of students/trainees, teachers/trainers and staff in TVET institutions					
Defining and implementing a GTHSs/GTIs reopening sanitary protocol	Development, printing and distribution of a protocol for cleaning and disinfection of educational institutions and hostels.				
	Upgrading of WASH facilities and equipment to increase the proportion of GTHSs/GTIs with safe water, handwashing stations, cleaning supplies and, wherever possible, establish or expand sex segregated toilets or latrines including provisions for menstrual hygiene management				
	Development and distribution of protocols on physical distancing and hygiene measures.				
	Development and distribution of clear guidance to monitor student and staff health and establish procedures if students or staff become unwell.				
GTHSs/GTIs -based preventive and life-saving messaging (health, hygiene, etc.)	Providing COVID-19 preventing kits for GTHSs/GTIs in affected townships in all appropriate languages; providing COVID-19 prevention guidelines in all appropriate languages in GTHSs/GTIs				
Staff and teachers/trainers training on COVID-19 prevention	Training of administrative staff and teachers on implementing physical distancing and school hygiene practices and increase staff at GTHSs/GTIs as				

Priority Area	Activities	Output Indicator & Target	Coordination		Proposed contribution by DPs
			Focal Department	Coordinating Department	
	staff health and establish procedures if student/trainees or staff become unwell.				
Increase investment in remote and distance learning/training to be prepared for a recurrence of disease transmission that necessitates re-closing of GTHSs/GTIs	Pursue the efforts initiated in phase 1 (1) to prepare for future rounds of GTHSs/GTIs closings, (2) to strengthen teaching and learning where closures remain in effect in affected Townships				
Administrative & academic adaptations (academic calendar, examinations, admissions, etc.)					
Priority programme 3: Communication at all levels					
Adjust and pursue the efforts around the communication strategy	Pursue the communication efforts initiated in phase 1 with a focus on TVET institutions reopening/remedial training. Prioritize communication between TVET authorities at Union level, heads of GTHS/GTI, and students/trainees.				

10 Annex

10.1 Questionnaires: Youth, Camp Committee, GTHS, Businesses

10.2 Research file (datasets)

10.3 Private Sector Demand & Opportunities Database

