

## Global Response Platform Briefing: Myanmar

Briefing call: 1100 (GMT), Tues 28 April 2026. [Sign up link.](#)

23 April 2026

### Summary

- Following the military coup of 2021, Myanmar's national education infrastructure has been almost completely destroyed as a deliberate act of policy by the junta.
- A generation of young people face profound uncertainty about their futures. Repressive laws, including conscription for those aged 18-35, have further increased risks.
- Escalating internal conflict has created approximately 3.7 million IDPs, with a further 1.6 million Myanmar refugees in neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Many of these are young people seeking places of safety.
- The UK 'visa brake' for Myanmar students, announced by the Home Secretary in March 2026, closes off in-person study pathways at UK universities.
- We recommend the following practical responses:
  - Partner with Prospect Burma to create and deliver scholarships for online UG, PG, diploma and certificate programmes.
  - Establish pilot in-person scholarships at branch campuses in countries already hosting Myanmar students.
  - Support alternative pathways, including university foundation and bridging programmes for students unable to complete secondary education due to conflict and displacement.
  - Provide direct institutional support and professional development to education organisations and virtual institutions.

### 1. Context: conflict and displacement in Myanmar

Myanmar has experienced forced displacement and refugee movements for decades as a result of armed conflict, ethnic persecution and political instability. The military coup of February 2021 marked a significant escalation of the crisis, triggering widespread violence, the collapse of governance structures, and almost all health and education provision across much of the country.

As of early 2026, UNHCR<sup>1</sup> estimates that approximately 3.7 million people are internally displaced, with projections suggesting this figure could rise to 4 million as conflict intensifies. Displacement is concentrated in the northwest, in Rakhine State, in the southeast (including Kayah, Kayah, and Shan States), and in Kachin State in the northeast.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121825>

The crisis has increasingly spilled across borders, creating severe regional displacement pressures. UNHCR<sup>2</sup> estimates that around 1.6 million Myanmar refugees are currently residing in neighbouring countries, notably Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Malaysia and Indonesia (Figure 1). Around a third of those displaced are undocumented or stateless, compounding protection, legal, and education access challenges.

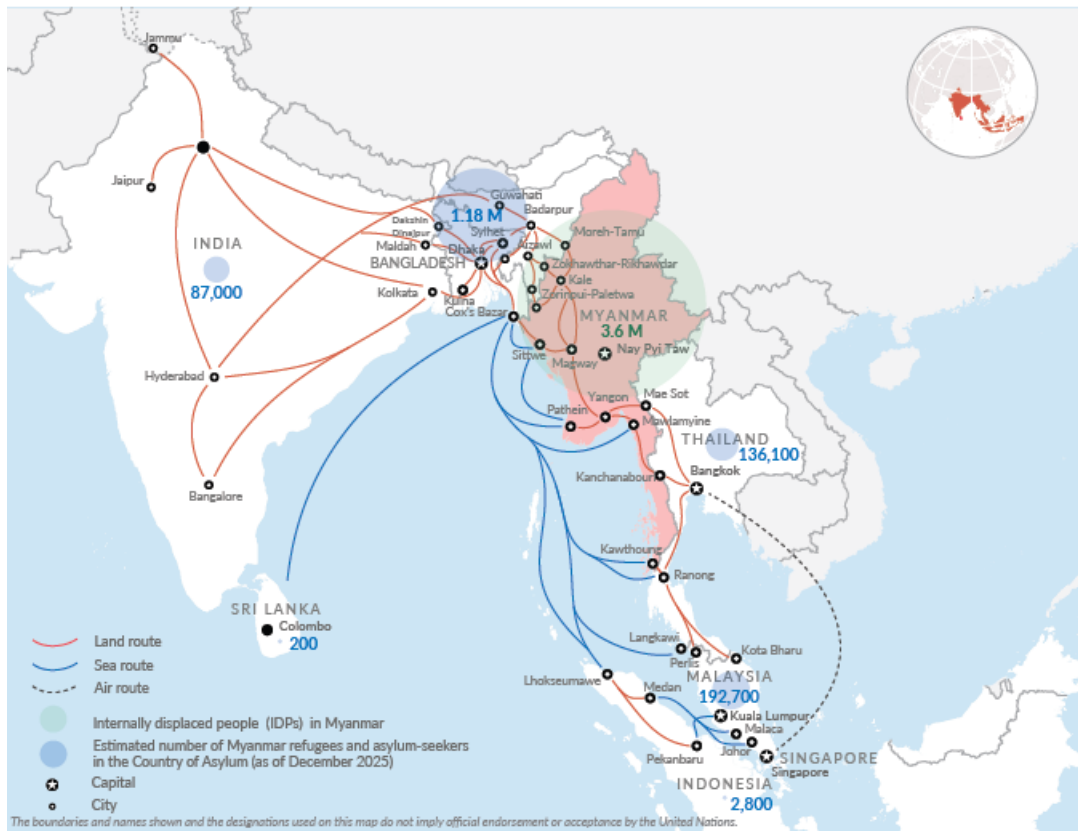


Figure 1 - Myanmar regional refugee routes and locations (UNHCR, January 2026)<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of mandatory military conscription in 2024, along with widespread forced recruitment practices, has further exacerbated displacement. An estimated 100,000<sup>4</sup> young people have now been forced to serve in the armed forces. Many in the conscription age range of 18-35<sup>5</sup> have fled the country to avoid this threat, seeking safety, education, and employment opportunities in neighbouring countries.

Combined with economic collapse and frequent natural disasters, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply. According to the UN 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, over 16 million people — nearly one-third of Myanmar’s population — now require humanitarian assistance.

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120547>

<sup>4</sup> <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/03/06/juntas-forced-conscription-of-youth-demands-urgent-international-protection>

<sup>5</sup> Ages 18-35 for men and 18-27 for women, with a service term of up to 5 years.

This is, fundamentally, a political crisis. Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar has remained under military rule. The results of a military-led election in December 2025 and January 2026 have not been recognised by the UK, United Nations or ASEAN<sup>6</sup>. The current trajectory indicates the continuation of authoritarian rule, with ongoing or intensified armed conflict likely to drive further displacement, protection risks and humanitarian needs, particularly for young people.

## 2. Key challenges students face in accessing higher education

It is estimated that three in four young people aged 18 to 24 - more than 5 million young people - are no longer in education or training, limiting their access to skilled employment<sup>7</sup>. Key barriers include:

- **Destruction of the national education infrastructure:** Education has been severely disrupted since the coup. Myanmar's military has increasingly targeted schools, universities, students and educators. From 2023 to 2024, there were 217 attacks on schools and 141 incidents of military use of school premises. Between 2021 and 2025, over 125,000 teachers lost their positions; at least 37 were killed, and around 500 were arrested, with 396 imprisoned<sup>8</sup>. Prolonged school closures since COVID-19 and the subsequent coup has meant that some students have been out of education for upwards of six years.
- **Universities as places of threat, not safety:** Public universities were closed by the junta at the time of the coup and some have since reopened only under strict military oversight. Attendance remains low, with students and staff subject to surveillance, intimidation, and arrest. Some military controlled institutions have become sites of forced conscription, including mandatory military training in high schools and universities. The use of VPNs has been banned by law.
- **Imprisonment and coercion:** Thousands of university students have been arrested and many imprisoned for political reasons<sup>9</sup>; those recently released continue to encounter substantial challenges in resuming their studies. Student activists targeted by the military junta have been forced to suspend their studies.
- **Lack of documentation:** Many students have been displaced by conflict and lost essential academic documents, making it all but impossible to verify their prior learning. Furthermore, large numbers of Myanmar students residing in refugee camps or neighbouring countries lack legal documentation, restricting their access to formal education systems.
- **Economic barriers:** Tertiary education abroad is a long-held ambition for many Myanmar students, but the cost of courses is prohibitive for most families. The rapid devaluation of the national currency and rising tuition fees have compounded this lack of affordability.
- **Relocation and travel risks:** According to UNDP, between 2021 and 2025, an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 young people relocated abroad to escape conditions in

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<sup>6</sup> [https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Old-Generals-New-Clothes\\_ANFREL-SAC-M-Large.pdf](https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Old-Generals-New-Clothes_ANFREL-SAC-M-Large.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Generation on Hold (2025), <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/generation-hold>

<sup>8</sup> Country Brief: Myanmar's Education Crisis (2025), <https://eiehub.org/country-briefs/country-brief-myanmars-education-crisis>

<sup>9</sup> <https://english.dvb.no/thousands-marched-for-democracy-in-myanmar-some-died-in-prison/>

Myanmar<sup>10</sup>. For many, leaving the country provides a pathway to safety, education, and financial stability, often through irregular migration. However, relocation is not without risk, as the Myanmar authorities have imposed tighter restrictions on passport issuance, renewals, and airport controls, limiting students' ability to pursue education abroad<sup>11</sup>.

- **Human trafficking:** young people are at high risk of being caught within human trafficking networks that operate with impunity across many areas of Myanmar, often supported by the junta or its proxies. Various “agencies” promising work abroad are in fact funnelling young women and men into sexual exploitation, forced marriage and other forms of abuse.
- **Skills gaps:** even prior to the coup, a quirk of the Myanmar national education system is that formal education ends at the conclusion of Year 10, while most international universities require evidence of full-time study up to the end of Year 12. Bridging and foundation courses are critically required to cover this gap and create pathways back into formal education.

### 3. What initiatives are already in place?

A longing for opportunity, and demand for higher education, remains strong across Myanmar. In the absence of accessible public education, private providers have expanded, but their high fees place them beyond the reach of most students. As a result, many young people have turned to alternative education pathways, including online learning, community-led initiatives, non-state education systems, and in-person courses delivered in IDP and refugee camps, as well as in border areas.

Non-profit institutions and ethnic education providers have expanded their post-secondary offerings. Online institutions, such as Spring University Myanmar and the Virtual Federal University, provide remote learning opportunities to students across the country. Much of this provision is not accredited. These platforms are particularly important for participants of the Civil Disobedience Movement, who face the most significant restrictions to continuing their studies in safety. However, most institutions face resourcing challenges which restrict course offerings and international recognition of certificates. The lack of accreditation hinders credit transfer, progression to further study abroad, and access to formal employment.

Several international initiatives have sought to address this gap, though all have faced disruption:

- USAID's Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Program (DISP) was launched in 2024 to support over 1,000 Myanmar students to study at international universities but was abruptly terminated in 2025, the first victim of the dismantling of USAID. Effective as of January 2026, the US government has now also paused the issuance of visas to Myanmar nationals.

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<sup>10</sup> Myanmar's militarisation of education (2024), <https://humanrightsmyanmar.org/myanmars-militarisation-of-education/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://forum-asia.org/joint-statement-myanmar-international-community-must-oppose-military-juntas-new-passport-law-uphold-freedom-of-movement/>

- The EU Mobility Programme for Myanmar (EMPM) launched in 2023 and awards scholarships to Myanmar students to complete transfer degrees at universities in ASEAN. The pilot will run to December 2026. A virtual scholarship element was trialled but discontinued.
- A few government-funded scholarship programmes continue (Singapore, Japan) but some are no longer accepting applications from Myanmar nationals (New Zealand) and visa processes in countries such as Australia and EU member states have become increasingly stringent.
- In March 2026, the UK Home Office announced that Myanmar students would no longer be eligible for student visas, resulting in the suspension of Chevening Scholarships and closing off other scholarship pathways offered by universities<sup>12</sup>. This has brought to a vertiginous end the century long relationship between UK universities and Myanmar.

Scholarship organisations such as Prospect Burma, Child’s Dream, and Daughters Rising continue to support Myanmar students to study in Thailand and other regional countries. However, in-person opportunities are limited and remain inaccessible to many students inside Myanmar due to safety concerns, lack of travel documents, and family or caregiving responsibilities.

#### **4. Online scholarships: a safe and cost-effective alternative**

Prospect Burma runs the only online scholarship programme supporting young people in and from Myanmar. Launched in 2022 with support in its early phases from the United Nations, the programme awards scholarships for students to attend degree (UG, PG), diploma and certificate courses online. Accredited courses provided by international higher education institutions are eligible for support, with demand highest for:

- Degrees enhancing the provision of services such as education, healthcare and community development;
- Degrees which equip students with skills for the future such as IT, public policy, business administration and engineering.

Prospect Burma works with a total of 10 international university partners, unlocking fee waivers, flexible admission and other support in kind. This includes Parami University, a Myanmar-founded institution which provides a liberal arts education accredited by Bard College in the US.

To date, scholarships have been awarded to a total of 86 students across the country with a year-on-year average retention rate of 96%. All students are provided with stipends to support laptop purchase and cover data fees, have access to mental health and counselling on demand, a contingency fund to support changes in circumstance, and are matched with Myanmar mentors to enable them to thrive during their studies.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visa-brake-changes-to-the-uk-visa-system>

The opportunity is currently open to students inside of Myanmar and on the borders, as well as those in IDP and refugee camps. This model can be expanded to support students in Thailand, India and further afield.

It is highly cost effective, at less than half the cost of a scholarship for study in Thailand and a fraction of the cost of in-person study in the UK. Online scholarships enable Prospect Burma's students to remain in situ, removing risks associated with international travel.

## **5. Recommendations for UK universities**

The crisis is severe, yet remains significantly underreported by UK media compared to Afghanistan, Ukraine and Palestine. Myanmar is ranked second in ACLED's 2025 Conflict Index, and claims the top spot as the most fragmented conflict worldwide<sup>13</sup>. These dangers are felt most acutely by the young.

The UK education system has a reputation for excellence across Myanmar, with UK universities viewed with particular respect. This is reinforced by deep, historic ties between these two countries.

UK universities now have an opportunity to play a significant and meaningful role in addressing this education crisis:

### **A. Create online scholarships for Myanmar students**

Create dedicated online undergraduate, postgraduate, certificate and diploma scholarships for Myanmar students affected by the current crisis for the academic year 2026/27, which can be managed through Prospect Burma's existing online programme.

#### Possible institutional contributions

- Reallocate existing in-person scholarship funds for Myanmar nationals towards online programmes
- Provide fee waivers for courses that will be of particular relevance to Myanmar young people, including education, healthcare, IT, public policy and administration, business and engineering
- Work in partnership with Prospect Burma to publicise these opportunities. Prospect Burma would then identify and select suitable students through its network of local partners in areas where students have little or no access to opportunity and support their enrolment

#### Key design considerations

- Prospect Burma would provide everything students need to succeed: stipends for data fees and laptop purchase, mentoring delivered by trained Myanmar mentors, access to mental health support and counselling, contingency funds to support changes in circumstance
- All courses should be credit-bearing or qualification-granting

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<sup>13</sup> <https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index>

- Scholarship funds originally allocated for in-person study would be able to support more students in the online format, allowing for a broader inclusion of students who would never be able to escape Myanmar or afford the costs associated with international travel
- Flexible delivery to accommodate inconsistent connectivity, conflict and other responsibilities (jobs, family). Ideally, courses should be delivered part-time
- Adopt flexible admissions practices for Myanmar students who cannot meet standard requirements, including waivers for certain criteria for qualified applicants

**B. Create scholarships at branch campuses in countries already hosting Myanmar students**

UK universities with existing branch or partner campus in India, Malaysia and elsewhere in the region can expand equitable access by establishing in-country scholarships for refugees and displaced persons for the academic year 2027/28.

Possible institutional contributions

- Pilot a small number of fee-waiver scholarships at regional branch or partner campuses

Key design considerations

- Scholarships must be open to those affected by conflict and IDPs as well as refugees as legally defined
- Consider partnering with existing scholarship providers such as Prospect Burma who can publicise opportunities, organise student selection and support student relocation
- Flexibility in recognition of prior learning may be needed to students with incomplete or missing transcripts
- Adopt flexible admissions practices for Myanmar students who cannot meet standard requirements, including waivers for certain criteria for qualified applicants.

**C. Support alternative pathways, including foundation and bridging programmes for students unable to complete secondary education due to conflict and displacement**

UK universities can provide access to programmes which provide pathways back into formal learning. Demand is high for these opportunities, given the 5 million young people who have dropped out of education or training since the 2021 coup. This is particularly relevant as a tool for inclusion of women, refugees and others from severely disadvantaged backgrounds.

Possible institutional contributions

- Pilot a cohort of students to attend suitable foundation or bridging programmes with fee waivers to widen inclusion

Key design considerations

- Partner with experienced organisations such as Prospect Burma to identify suitable students and support their enrolment
- Existing programmes could be adapted to the needs of Myanmar students, including part-time study and flexible pacing

- Consider extending to Rohingya students in Bangladesh and Malaysia, with the right support infrastructure in place
- Programmes could include optional English language and digital skills modules

**D. Provide direct institutional support and professional development to education organisations and virtual institutions.**

UK universities can collaborate with education providers and virtual higher education institutions to strengthen teaching quality, programme design, and organisational resilience. This could include support for faculty, curriculum and assessment development, support with online pedagogy and production of asynchronous materials, or practical organisational support.

Spring University specifically, are seeking support on the delivery of micro-credential programmes, sharing adaptable online learning materials that Spring can help contextualise, and institutional development as they plan their next phase of work and refine their operating model.

**Key design considerations**

- Prioritising partners led by displaced communities (in-country and in the region)
- Adapting existing programmes for part-time and flexible pacing.
- An opportunity to explore existing open education resources developed and shared by the UK institution as a starting point for collaboration.