



Australian Government



## MYANMAR COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE PLAN

- Australia is working alongside Myanmar as it navigates multiple complex transitions and responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Tourism, transport and manufacturing sectors have been impacted by COVID-19 and the peacebuilding process is under additional pressure.
- Australia will work in partnership with Myanmar to catalyse reforms in education and economic policy.

Australia has had diplomatic relations with Myanmar since 1952. In recognition of this partnership, Australia has worked closely with Myanmar during the COVID-19 crisis, and will stay committed to reducing poverty in Myanmar and supporting its transition to democracy. This includes support for the peace process that is working to bring to an end decades of conflict.

### COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

Myanmar is navigating multiple complex transitions: from military rule to a democratic government, from a closed to an open market economy and from conflict to peace. COVID-19 has amplified the challenges inherent in each of these transitions, as well as those presented by multiple humanitarian crises.

The COVID-19 crisis also poses new difficulties. While Myanmar has so far avoided widespread infections, the crisis will exacerbate poverty and food insecurity, setting back progress made over the last decade. It is placing pressure on the delivery of government services, especially in health and education. Economic impacts have fallen particularly on the tourism, transport and manufacturing sectors, where job growth has been strongest. Unemployment is rising, severely impacting women, youth and informal workers.

Falling foreign investment and remittances are putting further pressure on Myanmar's economy. The World Bank predicts GDP growth of 0.5 per cent for 2019-20 (down from an earlier forecast of 6.4 per cent) and there are risks the country could slip into recession. The social and economic pressures presented by COVID-19 will have knock-on effects for Myanmar's peace process and democratic transition, which are at a critical juncture. The formal peace process has continued despite COVID-19, but sustaining momentum may become more challenging.

Delivering transparent and credible nationwide elections in November 2020 will be a significant milestone in

Myanmar's democratic transition. Progress on peace and good governance will require a continued focus on building transparent and accountable government institutions, inclusive policy-making and protecting human rights.

Around one third of Myanmar is affected by conflict. This drives population displacement and humanitarian need. Over one million people in Myanmar and on the Thai-Myanmar border need humanitarian assistance. There are over 300,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), with conditions in IDP camps increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The situation is especially challenging for the communities facing sustained, active conflict. Access to essential services, such as healthcare, may become even more difficult for those facing movement restrictions, including 600,000 Rohingya in Rakhine State.

Myanmar ranks second of 187 countries in the Global Climate Risk Index. Disasters are frequent and undermine social and economic resilience. This increases security risks, including irregular people movement and drug production, and diminishes opportunities for trade. Efforts to address climate change in Myanmar are important to building stability and resilience to shocks.

COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting women and girls who are now at greater risk of poverty, school dropout, early marriage and violence. Women make up the greater share of workers in vulnerable employment and in those sectors most directly hit by the crisis. The fall in remittances as migrant workers return home or as incomes diminish will disproportionately affect female-headed households. COVID-19 prevention and care in families will mostly be borne by women, and rates of domestic violence have increased.

### AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE

Australia's development assistance in Myanmar is pivoting to respond to the needs presented by



COVID-19. This COVID-19 Development Response Plan is informed by Myanmar's own policies: its Economic Response Plan, Action Plan for the Control of COVID-19 in IDP Camps, Health Sector Contingency Plan and Response Plan for Education. The efforts of the Government of Myanmar and Australia are consistent with Myanmar's overarching Sustainable Development Plan.

Australia is providing integrated health security support in Myanmar through regional and global initiatives, such as Gavi. Through our bilateral investments, Australia will remain focused on education, where we are best positioned to make a major contribution and which remains critical for long term growth and social cohesion. We will adjust the emphasis of our programs to focus on economic pressures and assist economic recovery.

Australia will maintain its focus on finding durable solutions to humanitarian crises in Myanmar. This includes supporting conditions conducive to safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable returns of IDPs and displaced people in and Bangladesh and Thailand.

Australia has a strong inclusion focus in its programs. Women and girls, people with disability, ethnic minorities, IDPs, at risk children, the unemployed and other minorities will be central to our work. We are emphasising gender-responsive social protection systems, supporting the continuation of learning for all, providing high-quality analysis to underpin inclusive government policy decisions and supporting institutions to reduce conflict and improve rights.

In addition to Australia's specific support for addressing gender-based violence, we are ensuring gender equality is a priority across all our work in Myanmar, in order to improve the lives of women and girls.

### **Health Security**

In response to the Government of Myanmar's request, Australia rapidly provided essential medical equipment directly into Myanmar's health system as the pandemic was developing. Australia is also supporting Gavi, which has provided personal protective equipment for health workers, immunisations, disease surveillance, laboratory support, community engagement and emergency response coordination. Australia will support equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in Myanmar through multilateral and regional initiatives to finance, assess, deliver, and monitor COVID-19 vaccines. With funding from Australia, The Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism has allocated new funding to

Myanmar to enable it to sustain critical tuberculosis, HIV and malaria programs.

Australia is assisting the Government of Myanmar with communicable disease control, including initiatives to strengthen laboratories through CSIRO and the Mériieux Foundation. DFAT's Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security (CHS) will fund laboratory capacity building, biosecurity training and twinning, in partnership with CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness. CHS will also invest in research and development of new knowledge, tools, diagnostics and treatments for existing and emerging health security issues, including COVID-19. In partnership with Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration and Myanmar's Food and Drug Administration, CHS will strengthen Myanmar's medicines regulatory authority to improve the safety of medical products.

Through multilateral agencies and NGOs, Australia will continue to support the provision of life-saving assistance to conflict-affected and displaced people, including healthcare, family planning and reproductive health, and water supply and sanitation services. With our humanitarian partners, we will continue to assist the Government of Myanmar to provide essential healthcare, including services relating to COVID-19, by providing medical and protective equipment and improving infection control.

In Myanmar, the Australian NGO Cooperation Program will focus on gender and social inclusion in health security (communicable diseases, water and sanitation, general and reproductive health). Through Australia's Health Security Corps, the Australian Volunteer Program will bring specialist experience in strengthening laboratories, field epidemiology, policy development, public communication and animal health to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19.

### **Stability**

Supporting stability in Myanmar during and after COVID-19 is a multidimensional and long-term endeavour. Australia's stability efforts will encompass immediate assistance to conflict affected communities, fostering peace, supporting democracy and governance, bolstering social protection (particularly in rural communities) and supporting inclusive and high-quality education.

Myanmar will hold its second democratic election in November 2020. Support to the Union Election Commission, civil society organisations and Myanmar's Parliament will assist voters to exercise their democratic



rights, progressing Myanmar's democratic transition.

As the social and economic shocks of COVID-19 intensify in Myanmar, maintaining core services, such as education, will be crucial for long-term growth and social cohesion. Inclusive and quality education is a key focus of the Myanmar Government's democratisation process.

Australia's long-term support for education is shaping and driving many of the reforms necessary as part of a COVID-19 recovery. Australia will work with Myanmar's Ministry of Education and non-government education service providers to keep children in school, ensure education quality and improve the wellbeing of students and teachers, including in conflict areas and IDP camps. Our bilateral efforts are also building on and integrating global education funding, including COVID-19 education planning and response grants through the Global Partnership for Education.

Through our partnership with the World Bank, Australia will support Myanmar to ensure the continuous distribution of student stipends (a critical social protection measure for poor students) and school grants, to help keep up school enrolments, at a time when there will be pressure on children to drop out and help sustain family incomes. We will increase our focus on inclusive education for marginalised communities, including in Rakhine State. Through the Myanmar Education Consortium we will support ethnic education service providers to improve the quality of education delivered to children in non-government controlled and conflict affected areas, and help build a dialogue between government and ethnic organisations.

Australia's humanitarian assistance is enabling vulnerable people to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19, while sustaining essential, life-saving support. Working with local and international partners, we will meet basic needs to ensure conflict-affected communities have safer and more equitable access to protection and humanitarian assistance.

We will work to increase the resilience and self-reliance of disaster and crisis affected populations, including helping Myanmar deal with the implications of climate change. There will be strong alignment with our humanitarian response in support of Rohingya displaced in Bangladesh. Australia will continue to advocate for improved humanitarian access, protection of civilians and the cessation of violence.

We will find opportunities through the COVID-19 response to work with the Government of Myanmar and other actors to strengthen humanitarian policies and prevent and respond to sexual and gender based

violence. We will promote local leadership and ensure that humanitarian action meets affected people's needs.

The Myanmar Australia Peace Support program will promote stability, through working to mitigate conflict; build peace, including through support for the formal peace negotiations; and enhance social cohesion. Initiatives include inclusive community public health activities, COVID-safe peacebuilding practices and greater inclusiveness in peace negotiations. We will have a strong focus on promoting women's leadership in conflict mitigation, addressing the increased risk of gender-based violence due to COVID-19 in conflict areas and promoting the women, peace and security agenda.

As part of our long-term efforts to help build peace and improve the accountability of the Myanmar military, we will continue to provide carefully targeted training in international humanitarian law under a modest Defence Cooperation Program.

Australia's Supporting Reform and Improving Governance program will support core state institutions in Myanmar: the parliament, civil service, accountability institutions and statutory bodies. This includes the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, the Attorney General's Office and the Union Election Commission (UEC). This will contribute to stability and the Government of Myanmar's ability to deliver services and promote the protection of human rights. In particular, our support through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems will build the capacity of the UEC to deliver a transparent, credible and COVID-safe electoral process. Through support to UNDP, we will enhance institutional capacity to analyse, develop policy for and respond to COVID-19 effects, including mitigating the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and safeguarding people's rights.

Agriculture provides work for 85 per cent of rural households. COVID-19 threatens agricultural systems, supply chains and rural household economies. Australia's funding to the multi-donor Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) will support Myanmar's rural communities – including many in conflict affected areas – to boost their resilience to economic shocks. With a funding boost in 2019-20, LIFT has pivoted to help Myanmar respond to the pandemic and is strengthening Myanmar's social protection systems to enable payments to pregnant women, recent mothers, migrant workers, people with disabilities, IDPs and the elderly. LIFT's work will increase household incomes and assets, and provide women with greater control over these. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) will work to improve food production and the rural incomes through

improvements in agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

Poverty and insecurity associated with the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 may exacerbate illicit activity. The counter-narcotics and capacity development efforts of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) are helping to counter this risk and build long term stability. The AFP's prioritisation of child protection is important to help counter exploitation and abuse, which could increase as a consequence of COVID-19. Myanmar will also benefit from Australian regional assistance that is addressing illicit drug trafficking, terrorism, child sexual exploitation and financial crimes. Australia will support cross-border cooperation on crime and border security through the Mekong-Australia Program on Transnational Crime.

### **Economic Recovery**

In order to weather the economic fallout of COVID 19, Australia will support Myanmar with critical economic reforms and help catalyse private sector activity. Australia is supporting institutional strengthening and public financial management reform through the World Bank, which has already had an impact on increasing government revenues and improving accountability and transparency. Australia will develop new flexible, timely and gender sensitive support to the Government of Myanmar to underpin its economic transition and recovery.

Myanmar's developing private sector is feeling the effects of COVID-19. Australia will partner with the International Finance Corporation to support policy-making that promotes economic recovery and private sector resilience, with a gender lens. This work will create an enabling business environment that promotes private sector growth. The regional Investing in Women program will support women business leaders and workplace gender equality in Myanmar.

Austrade is introducing Australian companies to industry and government networks in Myanmar, demonstrating the high quality of Australian investment and its benefits to partner countries. Despite COVID-19, there is sustained investor interest in Myanmar. Australia is helping Myanmar by providing contacts, access and influence through our trade and development

relationship. In addition, Austrade and DFAT will continue to work closely with the Australian Chamber of Commerce to support Australian business in Myanmar for the benefit of both countries. We are strengthening the investment climate and working to grow trade, investment and the private sector in Myanmar. For example, Myanmar is Australia's fastest growing source of international students and our focus on education sector reform helps improve Australia's standing as an education partner of choice.

The Australian Border Force and the Department of Home Affairs are working with border agencies, including supporting the professionalisation of Myanmar's Departments of Immigration and Customs. Other efforts, including through cross-border and regional programs, are focusing on pandemic response, trade facilitation, border enforcement and civil maritime security.

Australia's investments in the Private Infrastructure Development Group and our Southeast Asia Economic Governance and Infrastructure Facility will support Myanmar to improve infrastructure planning, procurement and policies.

Australia will support Myanmar's management of water and energy resources. DFAT's Mekong Australia Program for Water and Renewable Energy will engage with Myanmar on the application of environmental and social safeguards, and will offer Australian technical assistance. We will connect this regional work with Australia's bilateral efforts on economic reform.

### **HOW WE WILL WORK**

Australia is supporting the COVID-19 response in Myanmar with an emphasis on accountability, coordination, effectiveness and gender. Our investments are targeted to areas where we can help to catalyse broader systematic reforms, particularly in education and economic policy. By working predominantly through well-established multilateral funding mechanisms and partners, Australia will amplify the impact of our investments and contribute to strong donor coordination that will be central to an effective COVID-19 recovery. Australia's development and humanitarian assistance complements our diplomatic engagement with the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and regional government.



TABLE 1: COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Program Plans	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
<b>Expected Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Myanmar is better prepared to prevent, detect and respond to emergencies, including health emergencies (SDG 3)</li> <li>- More people are better protected from health emergencies (SDG 3)</li> <li>- People have safer and more equitable access to protection services and humanitarian assistance (SDG 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More inclusive access to quality education (SDG 4)</li> <li>- Peacebuilding is enhanced and more inclusive (SDG 16)</li> <li>- Increased household income and assets with greater control by women (SDG 1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved environment for responsible business (SDG 8)</li> <li>- Strengthened capabilities for macroeconomic, public and financial sector management (SDG 8, 16)</li> </ul>
<b>Key Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Myanmar strengthens health systems, including preparedness for health emergencies</li> <li>- Myanmar improves response to health security threats (especially COVID-19)</li> <li>- Number of children immunised with Australian support</li> <li>- Number of vulnerable people provided with emergency assistance, including health and WASH, in conflict and crisis situations</li> <li>- Finalised government-led Eliminating Violence Against Women study with clear policy recommendations</li> <li>- Number of women and girl survivors of violence receiving services such as counselling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of poor children supported to attend school (290,000 by July 2021)</li> <li>- Increased completion rates in monastic and ethnic education schools</li> <li>- Women's participation in peace processes increases</li> <li>- Number of organisations and leaders mitigating community violence or effectively influencing social cohesion</li> <li>- Examples of significant government policy change (health, education or economic policy)</li> <li>- Number of people reached with new or improved social protection programs</li> <li>- Number of households with increased incomes (in LIFT Project areas - cumulative milestones 2020 -1.78m, 2021- 2.18m, 2022- 2.2m)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of policy and technical advice on economic recovery</li> <li>- Examples of Myanmar partnering with private sector</li> <li>- Increased budget for health and education</li> <li>- Reduced compliance costs to business</li> <li>- Improved "Doing Business" ranking</li> <li>- Integrated Tax Administration System in place; strengthened audit capacity</li> <li>- Government consolidated financial statement audited and publicly available</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Investments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Myanmar Humanitarian (Emergency Funds)</li> <li>- Women's Life Experiences Survey</li> <li>- Mérieux Foundation and Population Services International</li> <li>- GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance</li> <li>- The Global Fund</li> <li>- Health-sector human resource development (e.g., ASEAN-Australia Health Security Fellows, Australia Awards scholarships)</li> <li>- Strengthening Emergency Operations Centres</li> <li>- Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance</li> <li>- Regulatory Strengthening Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decentralised Funding to Schools Project</li> <li>- My-EQIP Education Quality Project</li> <li>- Myanmar Australia Peace Support Program</li> <li>- Myanmar Education Consortium</li> <li>- Livelihoods and Food Security Fund</li> <li>- Australian Federal Police, ACIAR, ACCC, Home Affairs and Defence activities</li> <li>- Australian Volunteers and the Australian NGO Cooperation Program</li> <li>- Mekong-Australia Program: Transnational Crime</li> <li>- Supporting Reform Improving Governance</li> <li>- Multilateral peacebuilding and Responsibility to Protect partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Private Sector Development Program</li> <li>- Economic Institutional Strengthening Program</li> <li>- Livelihoods and Food Security Fund</li> <li>- Australia Awards Scholarships</li> <li>- Governance and Infrastructure Facility</li> <li>- Private Infrastructure Development Group</li> </ul>