The 2014 census in Myanmar provided statistical data for townships across the country, enabling more detailed conclusions to be drawn about the current distribution of the rural and urban population. The 2014 census figures are thus a good starting point for more in-depth population analyses based on the 330 townships.

The 15 regions and states have highly diverse urbanisation rates. Nationally, the urban population averages 29.6% of the total population. As is to be expected, however, the percentage is very much higher in Yangon (70.1%) and Mandalay (34.8%) Regions, and in Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory (32.3%). In Kachin State, too, there is a high population concentration in urban centres, due to the security situation. The rural population figures, as a percentage of the total population, are highest in Ayeyarwady Region (85.9%), Magway Region (85%) and Sagaing Region (82.9%).

The rural-urban gender ratio is broadly similar across the country. There is a slight gender imbalance, with females predominating in both urban and rural areas, reflecting the fact that more men are labour migrants (in some cases seasonal or temporary) in neighbouring countries (Grundy-Warr/Yin 2002, Myat Mon 2010, Pearson/Kusakabe 2012). By contrast, Kachin State stands out for its noticeable surplus of males, amounting to more than 13%, mainly in rural areas, and 1% in urban areas. This is caused by selective labour in-migration by men in the mining sector (e.g. in Hpakant or the areas west of Indawgyi Lake; Nyi Nyi 2013).

In terms of age structure, there is little difference between the rural and urban populations nationally: 30.6% of the rural population is below 15 years of age, while the figure for urban areas is 28.6%, and 6% of the urban population is over 65 years of age, compared with 5.7% of the rural population (MNPED 2015: 16).

A far more nuanced picture emerges from analysis of the townships: alongside a small number of areas of urban population concentration of more than 75% in several townships in Yangon and Mandalay and one township in Myitkyina, there are some townships – all of them, without exception, located in regional and in some cases border cities around the country – with an urban population concentration above 50%. Nationally, however, townships with a rural population concentration above 75% predominate. Most of them are located in the main settlement area in the lowlands, from Central Myanmar to the Ayeyarwady Delta, and along the coasts, and have much higher absolute population numbers than the mountain areas, the majority of which also have a predominantly rural population. Unlike many other developing countries, then, Myanmar still has a very even population distribution with low urban polarisation at present.

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