

## Refugee Influx: Tak province, Thailand

7 January 2022

### BACKGROUND

In mid-December, tensions escalated between the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) and the Karen National Liberation Army following a series of raids and arrests carried out by the Tatmadaw against dissidents, including from the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), who had sought protection in and around Lay Kay Kaw, Myawaddy. Clashes erupted on 15 December 2021, and since 16 December, thousands of people have been displaced as a result of the conflict.

### POPULATION FIGURES

According to official figures published by the Tak Provincial Border Command Centre (TPBCC), as of 5 January 2022, the total accumulated figures since 16 December are 8,604 arrivals into Thailand and 6,373 returns to Myanmar.

There is currently only **one official Temporary Safety Area in Tak province**, at Ban Mae Kone Kane, also known as Mahawan Moei Khong cow shed, in Mae Sot district, where **2,231 individuals remain**.

Previously, there were other official sites which were closed after the authorities relocated the population. The closed sites were Mae Tao Klang school (closed on 25 December), Pan Subdistrict Chief's cow shed in Ban Don Chai (closed on 26 December), Mae Ku Luang site, also known as Mae Ku Mai Tha Sung (closed on 28 December), and Muen Rue Chai monastery (closed on 31 December 2021). Unofficial reports from local organizations suggest that groups, possibly hundreds of people, are staying in areas close to the border by the riverbank or in the jungle on both the Myanmar side and Thai side, waiting to monitor and evaluate the rapidly changing situation.



## CURRENT SITUATION

The situation at the border has been volatile since mid-December. Between 31 December 2021 and 6 January 2022, the TPBCC has reported two incidents of clashes in and nearby Lay Kay Kaw, close to the Thai border. Apart from a group of 185 individuals that crossed into Thailand and entered the Mae Kone Kane site on 3 January 2022, there were no other new arrivals in official records. Over 2,600 individuals left the site in the week between 31 December 2021 and 5 January 2022, despite reports of security incidents in Myanmar.

The position taken by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and the Royal Thai Army (RTA) is that the presence of refugees is temporary, and the circumstances in Myanmar allow for refugee's return in the near future. However, information gathered by actors on the ground suggests that for many of the remaining refugees in Tak, the situation in Myanmar is not conducive to return in safety and dignity. Some returnees left Thailand only to become internally displaced in Myanmar because of ongoing fighting or their homes were destroyed or looted. According to Myanmar news sources, a woman who had returned to Lay Kay Kaw from a shelter in Thailand was killed by the Tatmadaw's artillery fire in her village on 3 January 2022.

At the time of reporting, access to the temporary safety area has not been granted officially to UNHCR or any I/NGO. As the situation and the stay prolongs, there is growing concern that ad hoc humanitarian assistance, which is currently implemented through local partners and community-based organizations (CBOs), is unsustainable. Furthermore, the condition at the Mae Kone Kane Temporary Safety Area is not suitable for longer stays.

## HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Inter-sector coordination is led by UNHCR. The Field Inter-Sector Working Group (FISWG) in Mae Sot convenes regular meetings to share updates on the situation and humanitarian assistance by each sector to ensure a coordinated implementation of the response plans to the extent possible and needed. The FISWG has conducted a rapid needs assessment (RNA) remotely and will use the RNA findings to guide targeted humanitarian responses.



### PROTECTION

UNHCR leads the protection sector. Together with partners, the protection sector is developing protection monitoring tools and is exploring ways to provide psychosocial support and safe space for women and children.



### EDUCATION

Save the Children (SCI) and Teacher Focus, as education sector leads, are working with local CBOs to distribute assistance. Home-based learning kits and playing kits were prepared.



### HEALTH

International Rescue Committee (IRC), health sector lead, has partial access to Mae Kone Kane. Possibility of outbreak of COVID-19 and communicable diseases e.g. measles and acute watery diarrhea (AWD) is a concern given the poor conditions at Mae Kone Kane. Some COVID-19 vaccines have reportedly been administered to the population onsite by the Mae Sot hospital. OPD services and hospital referrals are also available.



### FOOD

The Border Consortium (TBC), food sector lead, has shifted from providing boxed meals to providing cooking items to support community kitchens at Mae Kone Kane. TBC is assessing the nutritional needs of the different sub-groups, e.g. babies and elderly, in order to explore supplementary foods, implementation for which would be in conjunction with the health sector.



**WASH**

IRC is WASH sector lead. Latrines, garbage bins, and other items were distributed at the Mae Kone Kane site. Water trucks for the main Mae Kone Kane site are managed by the RTG. IRC has provided water tanks and buckets to fill gaps where needed. IRC also provides sanitation support on the side, while the RTG takes the lead.



**SHELTER**

TBC, as shelter sector lead, has been supporting sites, including now-closed sites, with 'event' tents. The Mae Kone Kane site has both tents and existing cow shed structures available to provide shelter to the population. More tents and space are available onsite should there be a need for expansion. TBC is on standby for shelter assistance where necessary.



**NON-FOOD  
ITEMS (NFI)**

UNHCR, as NFI sector lead, has been working with partners to distribute children's kits, children-sized mosquito nets, diapers, and children's clothes. Dignity kits were also distributed through the NFI sector, with inputs and guidance from the protection sector. Standard NFI kits will be reviewed by the sector, to ensure that items respond to the needs of the population in the temporary safety area at Mae Kone Kane site, as far as possible.

**IDENTIFIED GAPS AND ONGOING NEEDS**

Agencies concerned will continue to advocate with the RTG at all levels, that in accordance with international standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, Thailand should allow entry to those seeking international protection. Furthermore, refugees fleeing unrest and fearing return should be relocated to holding areas where their physical safety can be better ensured and where humanitarian agencies can access them, as per the RTG SOPs.

The humanitarian agencies stand ready to support the RTG in addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees.

**PARTNERS IN THE RESPONSE**

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) | Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) | COERR Foundation | Help Without Frontiers (HwF) | Humanity & Inclusion (HI) | International Organization for Migration (IOM) | International Rescue Committee (IRC) | Malteser International (MI) | Right to Play (RTP) | Save the Children (SCI) | Sermpanya Foundation | Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) | Teacher Focus | The Border Consortium (TBC) | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) | Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) | United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) |

**MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE FOLLOWING LINKS**

**Regional portal** – [UNHCR Thailand-Myanmar Cross Border Portal operation page](#)

**Interactive map of the population** – [Population Movement Tracking – Myanmar/Thailand border \(Tak province\)](#)