

Myanmar Situation

13 APRIL 2022

The volatile situation in Myanmar following the 01 February 2021 coup has **resulted in increased armed conflict and subsequent population displacement** both within the country and across borders, including into Thailand.

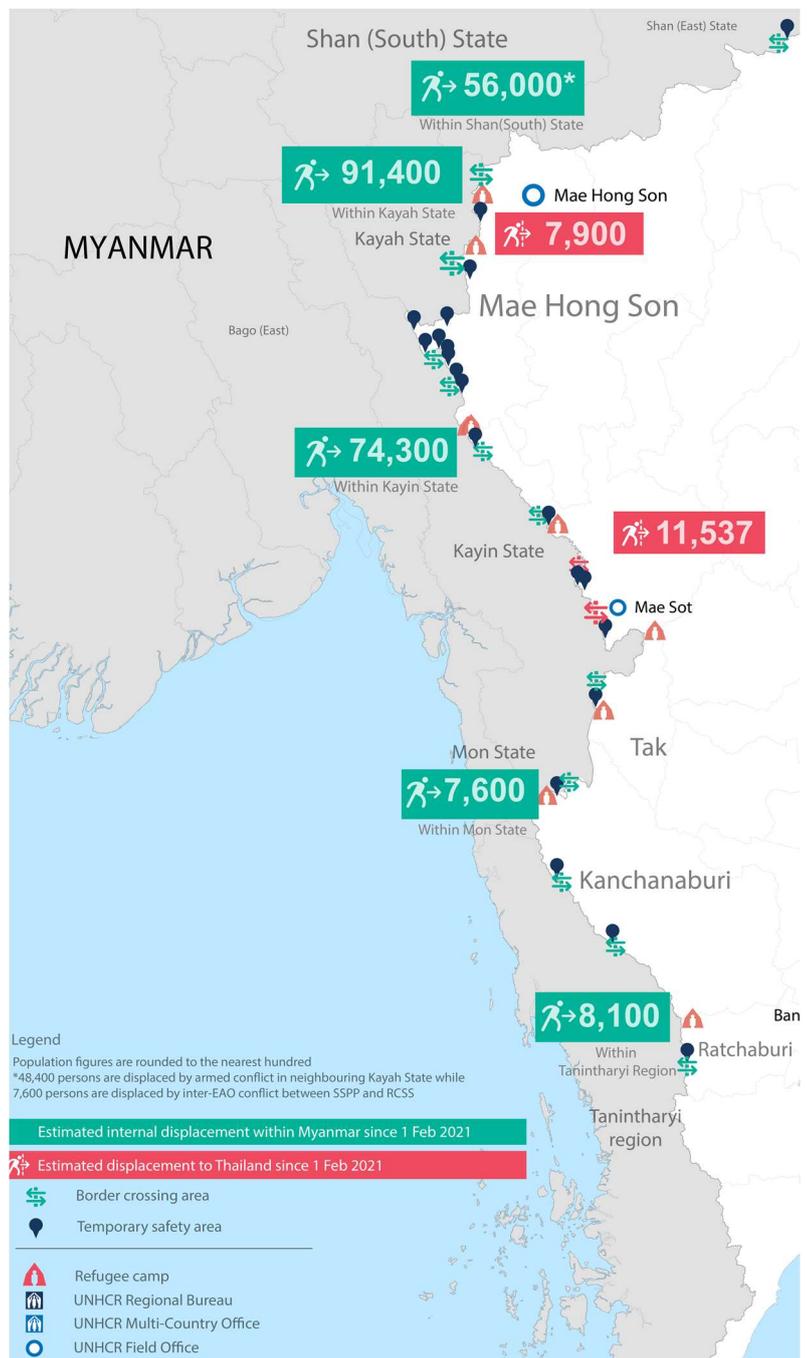
Since 17 March, **2,437 Myanmar refugees have crossed into Thailand**, according to the Royal Thai Government (RTG). The refugees have sought safety in Umphang and Phop Phra districts, Tak province.

Refugees are sheltered in **temporary safety areas (TSA)**, which are placed under the general jurisdiction of the Royal Thai Army in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) established by the RTG in March 2021.

SITUATION OVERVIEW ON THE THAI MYANMAR BORDER

In Kayah, clashes have been erupting and escalating since the Karen National Union (KNU) sent a letter to the Tatmadaw on 7 March, demanding the Military withdraw from the KNU controlled area – Brigade 6. As a result, 2,437 Myanmar refugees have fled the upsurge of violence in Kayah State into Phop Phra and Umphang Districts, Tak Province, since 17 March 2022. Out of this number, 869 have returned to Myanmar. Although some refugees have gone back to Myanmar, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) continues to record new arrivals. As of 13 April 2022, the RTG reported that 1,514 Myanmar individuals remain on the Thai side of the border in Tak Province, Thailand.

In Myanmar, the situation continues to deteriorate, with conflicts intensifying and spreading further. In the South-East, intensified daily clashes continued between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Fighting occurs over a large area, with incidents reported in Kayin State's Hpapun, Kawkareik, Myawaddy, Kyainseikgyi townships, Mon State's Kyaikhto and Bago Region's Shwegyin Township. Intensified clashes have also been reported in several areas of the Tanintharyi Region between the Tatmadaw, KNLA, and People's Defence Force (PDF), including Myeik and Palaw townships. In Kayah State, clashes continue to be reported in Demoso Township. Nearby Pekon Township in Shan State (South) has also been affected by fighting.



As of 28 March, there have been 558,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Myanmar since 1 February, of whom 231,800 are in the southeast provinces – Kayah, Shan, Kayin, Mon States, and Tanintharyi and Bago regions). In Kayin State, the situation in Hpapun and Myawaddy townships continues to deteriorate. Several clashes and airstrikes occurred around Kawakareik Township, resulting in the forced displacement of about 4,100 people. In Kayah State, the situation in Demoso Township continues to be tense, with security risks prompting 3,220 IDPs to move to safer locations within the township and towards Shan State’s Pekon and Hsihseng township.

COVID-19 IS SPREADING AMONG THE IDPS COMMUNITY DISPLACED IN SOUTHERN MYANMAR

COVID-19 is spreading quickly amongst IDPs in Kayah State’s Demoso Township as tens of thousands of civilians flee their homes in a bid to find safety. About half of all people in displacement camps are believed to have caught the virus. Access to test kits and medical treatment remains out of reach for the majority due to insecurity and access restrictions. Around Lay Kay Kaw, more than 50 cases were found positive for COVID-19 during the first week of March. A quarantine and mobile clinic structure has been set up to monitor and treat COVID-19 patients.

NEW ARRIVALS IN UMPHANG AND PHOP PHRA DISTRICT THAILAND

The refugees are currently sheltered in Temporary Safety Areas (TSA) in five different locations, which are placed under the general jurisdiction of the Royal Thai Army in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) established by the RTG in March 2021. The largest groups are being accommodated at Hser Tha village (Doi Tone) (734 individuals) and Lay Tong Ku village (450) in Umphang district. On 31 March, individuals at an unofficial site at Mae Klong Kao were relocated to Hser Tha village (Doi Tone). Besides, 260 refugees are staying in Ban Nongluang and 70 in Mai Royong Kee village, both located in Umphang District. On 27 March, some 200 Myanmar refugees sought safety in Phop Phra District and returned the following day to Myanmar (on 28 March).

The first arrivals of refugees who crossed into Thailand on 17 March via a land border were able to carry some items they had received on the Myanmar side, including food supplies and basic assistance. Representatives of the group were granted access to the local market and received assistance from the local community, who provided food and drinking water. NFIs were also donated by the camp committee of the Nupo Temporary Shelter for refugees in Umphang district. The NFI sector provided blankets and sleeping mats to the local authorities to be distributed to the group.

Recent arrivals into Umphang district after 23 March, fleeing armed conflict opposite Per Klerng village, had not brought any belongings with them. The group at Ban Lay Tong Ku is mainly composed of elderly people, women, and children. Most men, heads of households, settled their families in Thailand and returned to Myanmar to tend to their homes and belongings. Although only 450 individuals remain at this location, a total of 882 individuals have sought safety at Ban Lay Tong Ku village since 23 March. The local authorities identified needs for NFIs: tarpaulins, sleeping mats, blankets, clothes, and dignity kits for men and women. The NFI sector has provided tarpaulins, sleeping mats, blankets and dignity kits for distribution, and the shelter sector has provided plastic sheets.

In the Umphang district, the health sector has provided medication for malaria at Doi Tone, where 11 malaria patients were identified, and first aid kits at Ban Nongluang, Doi Tone, and La Tong Ku. Public health officials do not seem to have a strong presence at the sites, although temperature screening was conducted for arrivals at Ban Nongluang, and no severe illness was reported. Paracetamol was given to individuals with a high fever. The WASH sector has provided hygiene kits and gallons of drinking water to support that being provided by villagers. However, the current assistance is considered insufficient, and the lack of access to the site makes a comprehensive needs assessment and response difficult.

The WASH situation is of particular concern with insufficient clean drinking water supplies and poor or non-existent sanitation facilities; hence open defecation is taking place at some sites. At the Lay Tong Ku site, the primary water source is a river

that serves for washing and drinking purposes. This site also requires water and sanitation facilities to prevent waterborne disease transmission and medical supplies (e.g., first aids and medications). At Ban Nongluang, there is only one deepwater well and one toilet. At Doi Tone, the main water supply is from a spring.

UPDATE ON SECTOR ACTIVITIES

Assistance by the different sectors has been hampered by constraints of access. Although the local community is at the forefront of the response, there is a lack of local capacity to respond to protection standards. Therefore, all partners are currently reinforcing outreach to local Community-Based Organizations with enhanced engagement. The objective is to assess the need for capacity and support and identify areas where partners working in each sector can contribute to improving the standards of the response in case of emergency, especially when access is not granted. Besides, **the Border Consortium (TBC)** is currently working on a case study about the response during the large influx that came into Mae Kon Kan in December 2021. Based on this study, the INGOs expect to draw conclusions to adjust the emergency logistic plan better. The **Health sector** is conducting a similar exercise as the last influx revealed difficulties in medical transportation, among other challenges. Also, health agencies had minimal capacity, especially when managing severely chronic cases and/or cases requiring long-term treatment, such as cancer, which requires transfer to nearby hospitals. The sector concluded that the best way to overcome these gaps is to give local partners more significant support and roles in the response framework as they might (1) enjoy easier access and (2) therefore better assess the situation and needs.

The **Food sector** has prepositioned sufficient food stock and stands ready to support the Thai-led response in case of a large influx. Furthermore, the sector has considered the environmental impact of the distribution of lunchboxes, which creates a substantive amount of waste if there are many new arrivals. Therefore, the sector is purchasing recyclable cardboard to reduce waste production when refugees seek refuge in Thailand. Similarly, the Shelter sector is reconsidering materials used in TSAs and holding areas to improve protection standards while reducing its environmental footprint. In Tak province, the **WASH sector** coordinated four trainings provided by **UNICEF** to local CBOs and WASH partners on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Protection inclusion and Gender mainstreaming, WASH Standards, and Indicators for Delivering Quality Service, and Hygiene Promotion in Emergencies. The **NFI sector** has received unbranded items such as blankets, and kitchen sets are scheduled to be delivered in Thailand in the first week of April. Additionally, the sector agreed on reviewing the minimum standard NFI package and developing a strategy for distribution at the community level rather than the household level. The latter approach will address distribution challenges when there is no direct access. The **Health sector**, for its part, is planning a refresher training on Mental Health Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) in collaboration with **IOM**. Building on the MHPSS network established in 2021, the sector targets last year's participants and other groups of volunteers, MHPSS volunteers, medics, nurses, counsellors, and community outreach workers.

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