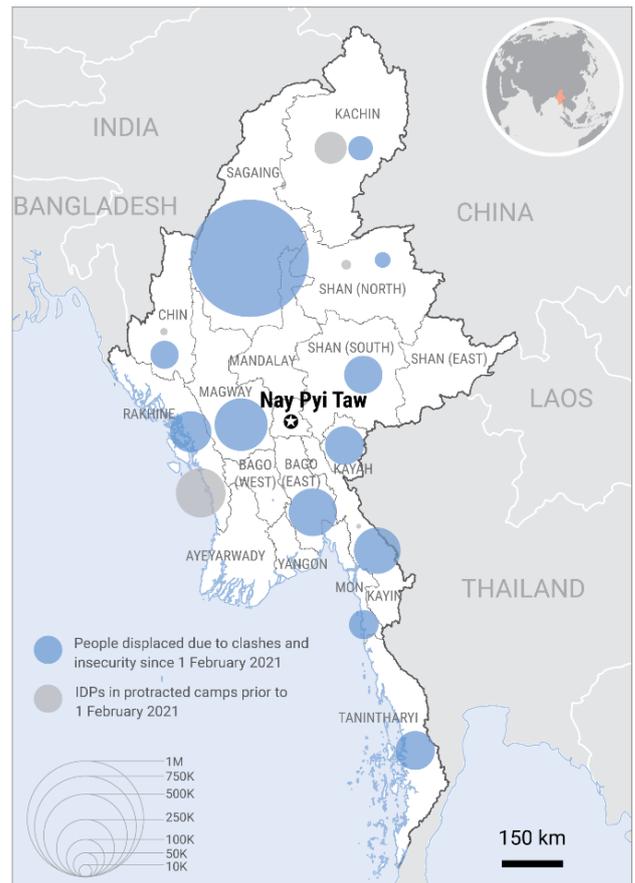


This independent update, covering humanitarian developments up to 25 March, is produced by OCHA Myanmar under its global mandate, in collaboration with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group and UN agencies. Response figures are based on self-reporting by organizations to clusters. The next humanitarian update will be issued end of April 2024.

HIGHLIGHTS & KEY MESSAGES

- Amid a deepening humanitarian crisis, conflict has escalated across multiple states and regions of Myanmar during March.
- People are fleeing their homes in record numbers, with the number of displaced people reaching more than 2.8 million, including more than 2.5 million people who fled conflict and insecurity since the 2021 military takeover.
- In Rakhine, civilians are bearing the brunt of ongoing fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and Arakan Army (AA), with deadly aerial bombardment and heavy shelling, including in residential areas. The violence is raising grave protection concerns and exacerbating already severe humanitarian needs.
- Many vulnerable displaced people in Rakhine are facing water scarcity as they head into the driest weeks of the year. Provision of shelter support ahead of the cyclone season is critical. Food insecurity is also a major concern with soaring prices and extremely limited market supplies in many locations.
- In Kachin, more than 18,000 people have been displaced in 10 townships since the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) launched a new offensive on 7 March.
- In the Northwest, ongoing clashes are severely impacting civilians in Kale Township in Sagaing. An estimated 28,000 people have been displaced since the escalation of fighting between the MAF and People's Defense Forces (PDFs) in this area in late February.
- A lack of funding is undermining response efforts. The 2024 [Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#), which appealed for US\$994 million, is only **4 per cent funded a quarter of the way into the year**. Additional resources are urgently needed to assist 5.3 million people in need and replenish depleted supplies ahead of the cyclone season.



KEY FIGURES*

2.8M

Total people currently internally displaced across Myanmar

2.5M

People currently displaced by clashes and insecurity since February 2021

289K

People who remain internally displaced due to conflict prior to February 2021, mainly in Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, and Shan

4% FUNDED

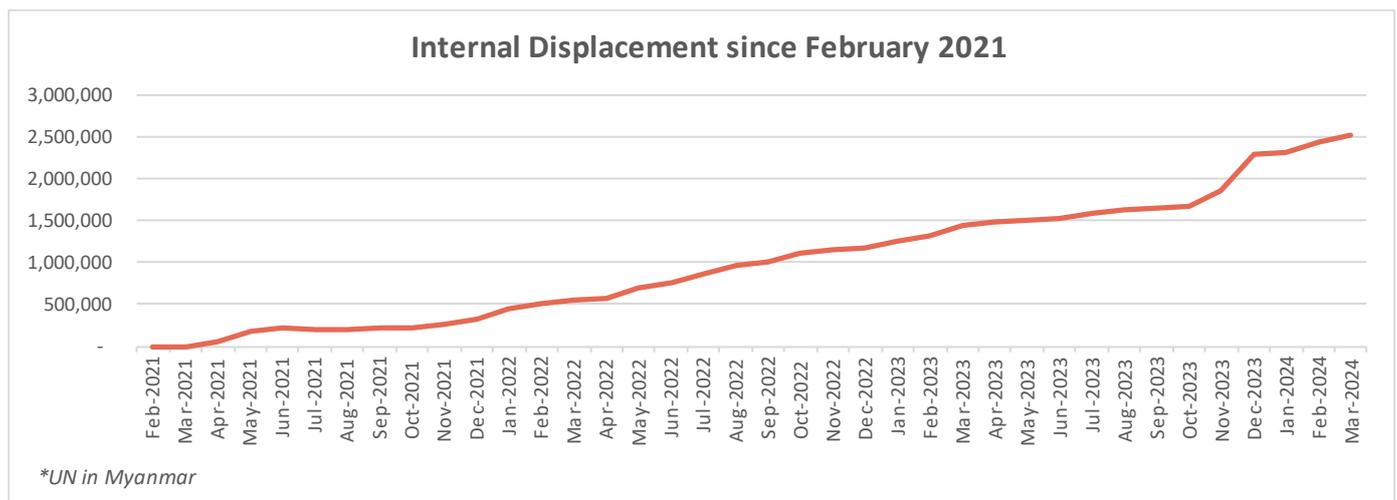
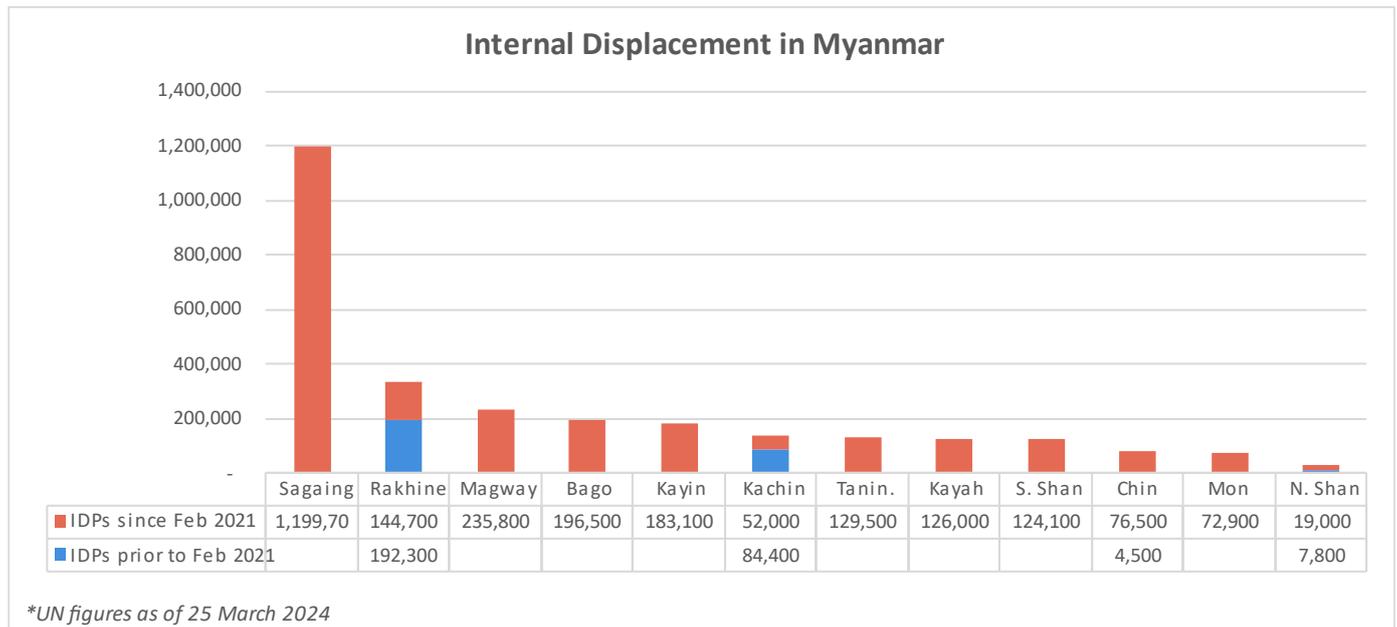
The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan has received \$41M against the \$994M appeal.

**Displacement figures fluctuate during any given month. These figures represent the number of people currently verified as displaced. Cumulative numbers for returns and displacement are not always available.*

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Expanding conflict and displacement across the country

The security situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate, with armed clashes taking place in many parts of the country. In the first quarter of 2024, fighting has intensified particularly in Rakhine, Kachin, Sagaing and the Southeast. Conflict, involving the deployment of heavy weapons, aerial bombardment and shooting, has driven a surge in displacement, civilian casualties, protection risks, and humanitarian needs. More than 2.8 million men, women and children are internally displaced, with the vast majority – more than 2.5 million – forced from their homes by conflict and insecurity since the 2021 military takeover. With changes in territorial control in many parts of the country since the escalation in conflict last October, the access and response environment has become more complex. Advocacy continues with all duty bearers to support an expansion of humanitarian access and to themselves provide assistance to people in need in their respective areas of control.



Increasing risks for civilians in Rakhine

In Rakhine, the civilian population is paying a heavy price amid continued fighting between the MAF and AA, with deadly aerial bombardment and heavy shelling, including in residential areas. Since the year-long informal ceasefire between the two sides broke down on 13 November 2023, the renewed conflict has raised grave protection concerns

and exacerbated already severe humanitarian needs. The renewed fighting has reportedly killed or injured hundreds of civilians.

Fighting intensified in March, particularly in Kyaukpyu, Maungdaw, Ponnagyun, Ramree and Rathedaung townships. Of Rakhine's 17 townships, 15 have been affected. Multiple townships – including Ann, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Kyaukpyu, Maungdaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Ponnagyun, Ramree, Rathedaung, and Sittwe – have been under continued artillery fire and aerial bombardment during the reporting period. Explosive ordnance contamination, including from landmines, is now a significant safety risk across affected locations. The fighting has resulted in a surge of new displacement in Rakhine and Paletwa in Chin, with an estimated 157,000 people fleeing their homes since the ceasefire failed. When combined with those who were already displaced, this takes total current displacement in Rakhine to well over 300,000 people.

The state's capital, Sittwe has progressively emptied and is increasingly isolated. Between 29 February and 9 March alone, three separate artillery shelling incidents impacted civilian areas in Sittwe, killing a total of at least 29 civilians and injuring 42 others, while also damaging buildings, including a school. In Rakhine and other conflict hotspots throughout the country fighting has moved into urban areas and all parties are reminded of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to protect civilians, including aid workers, as well as civilian property.

Water Scarcity in Rakhine

- *During the 2024 dry season, water scarcity is expected to affect almost 84,000 displaced Rohingya people, as well as other IDPs and villagers in Rakhine, with vulnerable people in displacement camps in Pauktaw being the hardest hit. Water scarcity is a major issue from mid-April to June every year, and results in communities using unsafe water sources and walking long distances to get meagre quantities of water for drinking and cooking. This exposes IDPs to contaminated water, leading to an increased incidence of diarrhoeal diseases.*
- *Water scarcity is expected to mostly affect Pauktaw, Ponnagyun and Sittwe townships, which host high numbers of IDPs. Other affected townships include Ann, Gwa, Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Munaung, Rathedaung and Toungup. There is a heavy overlap between conflict areas and water scarcity hotspots.*
- *In most years, water boating is needed to ensure continuity of supplies but if movement restrictions remain in place, this will be extremely challenging in 2024, despite water levels rapidly dropping. Additional access and funding are urgently needed to enable WASH partners to implement time-sensitive and life-saving support.*

As the fighting escalates, the risk of forced recruitment by all parties to the conflict is a major protection concern, particularly for vulnerable Rohingya people. There have been reports of forced recruitment of young Rohingya people in Buthidaung, Kyaukpyu and Sittwe townships and there is the potential for this to add to intercommunal tensions in Rakhine. Fear over forced recruitment and conscription is also contributing to people going on the move and there are also concerns about the law's impact on the availability of young national humanitarian workers to support the response. Since last November, arbitrary arrests have continued across the state, with more than 1,400 people reportedly detained for alleged affiliation to either side of the conflict.

Since the resumption of the conflict four months ago, people in Rakhine have grappled with soaring prices and unavailability of food and other essential supplies. Cash is in short supply due to banking disruptions, affecting people's ability to buy what they need to survive. Amid these challenges, the nutrition situation is worrying. The management of malnutrition for children under five and pregnant and lactating women (PLW) has been severely impacted by insecurity and movement restrictions in many townships. The nutrition response is heavily reliant on availability of therapeutic supplies, but the transport of these commodities is currently extremely challenging.

Closure of roads and waterways and local movement restrictions are further restricting access to markets, where these are operating. Travel Authorizations remain pending with the de facto authorities, affecting the scale of operations. Phone and internet connections have been shut down since January, completely or partially in many locations, with the exception of Ann, Gwa, Munaung and Thandwe townships. This communication blackout is severely limiting people's ability to access and share information about their safety and assistance. It has also affected humanitarian organizations, hampering their capacity to coordinate with teams on the ground and monitor activities.

Despite access constraints, humanitarians are working to stay and deliver, providing assistance where they can. Some humanitarian activities in IDP camps remain operational through volunteer and camp-based staff. Additional funding is urgently required to replenish stocks of essential supplies to ensure that response efforts can continue and be delivered at scale when access opens up to meet pressing needs. There is also a need to prepare for the cyclone season that is now looming.

Escalation in Kachin

In the Northeast, conflict has intensified in Kachin since early March. The KIA launched a new wave of offensives against the MAF between Myitkyina and Bhamo towns on 7 March and clashes continue to escalate in several townships, including Hpakant, Sumprabum and Tanai. The KIA is reported to now control more than 20 small and major MAF posts including important tactical points on the main road between Myitkyina and Bhamo. More than 18,000 people have been displaced in 10 townships since 7 March. Artillery fire reportedly killed 18 civilians, including 4 children, in Bhamo and Waingmaw townships during March. The situation in Bhamo continues to worsen, with increasing media reports of arbitrary killings and arrests.

More than 1,000 people were temporarily trapped in Aung Myay (2) Village in Waingmaw Township between 9 and 14 March amid renewed armed clashes between the MAF and the KIA and People's Defense Forces (PDFs). The people were stuck in the village monastery in a highly vulnerable location between opposing sides. Interventions by local actors and religious leaders led to an evacuation to a safe displacement site in the township on 14 March.

The security situation in northern Shan remains relatively stable with a ceasefire largely holding since January 2024, although there have been some isolated clashes. Lashio Airport in northern Shan has re-opened, with flights resuming on 19 March between Lashio and Yangon allowing for the return of humanitarian staff following a footprint lightening there at the height of the conflict. The airport had been closed since the escalation of conflict in October 2023.

Persistent conflict across the Southeast

In the Southeast, intense fighting with aerial bombardment and artillery shelling continues in southern Shan, Kayin, and Tanintharyi, resulting in the forced displacement of thousands of civilians. The conflict between the MAF and various armed groups has seen more than 10,000 people flee from 17 villages in Pinlaung Township in southern Shan since early March; 7,000 people from 12 villages in Dawei Township in Tanintharyi; and 5,000 people in Myawaddy Township in Kayin since mid-February. On 16 March, an airstrike in a village in Kyainseikgyi Township in Kayin reportedly caused the deaths of four civilians, including two displaced people and two school children. Clashes and airstrikes in the area also reportedly resulted in the destruction of a primary school and several houses. Tensions are escalating in southern Shan between the Pa-O National Liberation Army and MAF, in Hopong and Hsihseng townships in particular. This saw airstrikes and shelling in Hopong Township on 16 March, reportedly injuring several civilians and damaging homes.

Surging displacement in the Northwest

In the Northwest, clashes between the MAF and PDFs have intensified in several villages around Kale Town in Kale Township in Sagaing since late February. Numerous villages on the outskirts of Kale Town have been frequently shelled. Some 28,000 people from affected villages have reportedly fled their homes. The security situation in Kale is deteriorating with the fighting spreading into urban areas and displaced people and residents leaving the town for safer locations. Also in Sagaing, intensifying clashes in Kani Township have displaced more than 12,000 people since 1 March. The conflict reportedly killed more than 30 civilians, injured many more, and damaged or destroyed more than 500 houses in Chin, Magway, Sagaing, and Mandalay between 7 and 17 March.

Explosive Ordnance: A multi-generational crisis in the making

The proliferation of landmines and other explosive ordnance (EO) in Myanmar has reached alarming levels over the past year, posing a grave threat to civilians. In 2023, there was a staggering surge in casualties resulting from landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), with a total of 1,052 casualties reported nationwide. This represents a dramatic 270 per cent increase compared to the 390 casualties recorded in 2022, which was already the highest number since the records began. Sagaing, which hosts the largest numbers of IDPs nationwide, had the highest proportion of casualties at 35 per cent, followed by Shan and Bago at 12 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. Children made up almost a quarter (21 per cent) of the total casualties, underscoring the disproportionate impact on vulnerable

populations. Prior to the military takeover, landmine contamination was predominantly concentrated in Kachin, northern Shan, parts of the Southeast, Rakhine, and some areas in Chin. Since February 2021, landmine incidents have been reported in all states and regions of Myanmar, except Nay Pyi Taw. All parties to the conflict are called upon to cease the use of these weapons, especially in civilian areas.

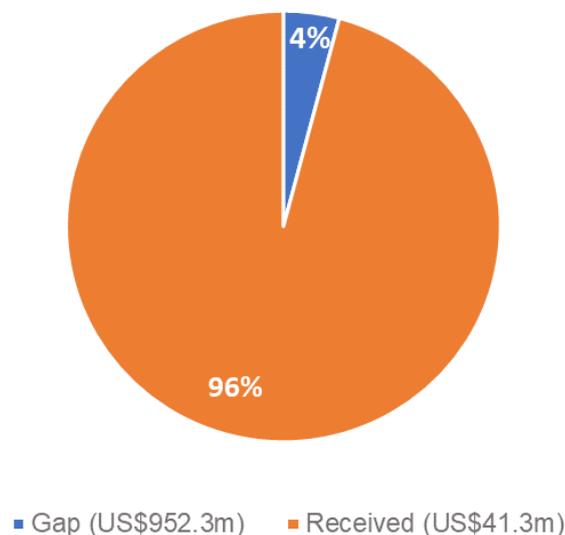
The encroachment of landmines into residential areas and towns since 2021 has significantly heightened risks to civilians and is now a critical humanitarian and development concern. For humanitarians, such saturation of EO is a threat to people's safety, survival and access to essential services, but there are also wider development implications with contamination posing an enormous obstacle to returns, threatening agriculture and food production, and generating a long-term social burden through acquired disability. In the 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Analysis, nearly half of IDP returnee households reported having members impacted by EO in the 12 months preceding data collection. Being injured or killed by explosive hazards was also the main security concern faced by boys, men, girls, and women from IDP returnee households, and EO was the main Housing, Land and Property problem reported by IDP and IDP returnee households.

Humanitarian mine action organizations operating in Myanmar are seeking permission to conduct surveys aimed at identifying and marking mined areas, particularly in regions being considered for IDP returns. While awaiting this survey clearance, the implementation of semi-permanent hazard marking, coupled with explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), can significantly mitigate the risk of accidents. Victim assistance for those affected is another immediate priority intervention. Together, these are the current focus of humanitarian Mine Action operations. While there is momentum in these initiatives, there are huge gaps due to a lack of funding. To meet growing needs across the country, additional support is urgently required to scale up these response efforts in the areas of highest contamination, expand training of humanitarian personnel on EORE and support enhanced coordination among those working in this sector. An upcoming multi-year allocation on EORE and disability inclusion by the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund will go some way towards meeting these needs but much more is required. Donors are urged to consider how they can contribute to addressing what is fast becoming a multi-generational crisis for Myanmar.

Funding duty of care and protection mainstreaming

A quarter of the way into 2024, the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) remains just 4 per cent funded with only \$41m received against the \$994m required. A dramatic scale-up in support is required to avoid widespread unmet needs and catastrophic consequences for vulnerable people. The consequences of gross underfunding are outlined in a special annex to the [HNRP](#) (see page 83). Inadequate humanitarian funding in 2023 (HRP was 44 per cent funded) has contributed to both the scale and severity of needs in 2024. Donors are urged to dig deeper in solidarity with the increasingly desperate people of Myanmar and in support of both humanitarian and development activities that address their needs.

Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan - 2024
(US\$993.5m)



Ensuring the safety and protection of aid workers, particularly those working for local organizations on the frontline of the response, is a priority for Humanitarian Country Team in 2024. In response, costings for the 2024 HNRP include a dedicated 5 per cent loading across all activities to support the normalization of duty of care costs being included in project proposals submitted to donors, particularly by local actors. Local partners have consistently reported a need for donors to better support core costs for their organizations, including investment in measures that support the safety and wellbeing of their personnel.

The mainstreaming of protection across all sectoral activities is a minimum expectation in the response but historically this work has not been properly funded within each sector's interventions. In an attempt to address this in 2023, each cluster has added a dedicated 5 per cent loading for protection mainstreaming across their activity costings. This is aimed at normalizing and promoting protection mainstreaming as an activity that must be both planned by and funded for all partners. The Protection Cluster is implementing a series of protection mainstreaming trainings across all clusters to expand understanding of what is expected and develop cluster-specific protection mainstreaming checklists to help support implementation.

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