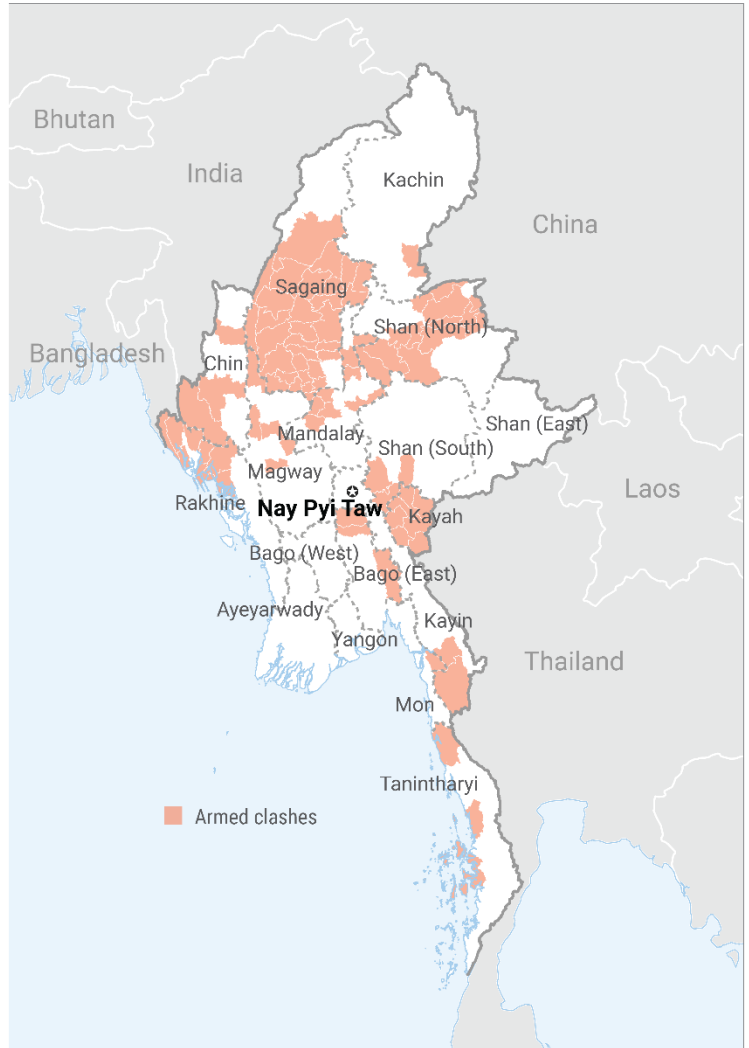


Highlights

- Fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and various groups, including Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), persists across much of the country.
- More than 660,000 people are estimated to have been newly displaced since the escalation of armed conflict on 27 October, with some people displaced several times and others already starting to return home. Total current displacement now stands at 2.6 million people nationwide.
- The volatile context is generating significant protection risks including increased civilian casualties, arbitrary arrests, exploitation, forced recruitment and forced labour.
- Food, safe shelter, non-food items and hygiene kits, basic health services and protection support remain priorities with shortages of essential supplies being reported in many areas due to commercial and humanitarian transport blockages.
- Despite insecurity, access, and telecommunication challenges, provision of essential humanitarian assistance to affected people continues where possible using a variety of flexible approaches. Humanitarian partners have now reached more than 80 per cent of those displaced in northern Shan.
- The UN and partners continue to seek to access a greater proportion of affected people. An inter-agency mission was completed to Wa earlier in December and another is approved for the delivery of assistance to IDPs in southern Shan.
- Despite surging needs, the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan is just 29 per cent funded days before the end of the year. An urgent injection of funds is desperately needed to sustain the response into the new year.



Situation Overview

Conflict between the MAF and multiple armed groups, including EAOs and PDFs, persists in many parts of the country involving armed clashes, airstrikes and artillery shelling and causing a surge in civilian casualties, displacement and destruction of civilian properties in numerous townships. Unverified field reports indicate that at least 378 civilians, including men, women, and children, have reportedly been killed and 505 others have been injured since the escalation began in late October. Since the intensification, more than 660,000 people are estimated to have been newly displaced in northern and southern Shan, Kayah, Rakhine, Chin, Sagaing, Mandalay, eastern Bago, Kayin, Mon, and Tanintharyi. There have been reports of some displaced people returning home while others have moved multiple times for safety. Some are reportedly reluctant to leave current displacement sites in northern Shan due to the risk of forced recruitment. Total current displacement nationwide now stands at a record 2.6 million people.

The movement of people and transportation of goods is being heavily curtailed, while interruptions to phone and internet services are impacting on the sharing of civilian safety information and humanitarian operations. The lack of humanitarian and commercial access to transport routes is creating a scarcity of food, shortages of essential household items, soaring commodity prices and a fuel crisis in affected areas. Partners have identified the most urgent humanitarian needs across conflict-affected areas as food, safe shelter, non-food items and hygiene kits, basic health services and protection support. Faith-based organizations and local responders, in collaboration with international organizations, continue to provide lifesaving assistance to displaced and affected communities wherever access is possible. Despite an extremely challenging operational context, including supply stockpiles that are heavily depleted due to underfunding, access constraints and the rapid and unpredictable escalation of needs, humanitarian partners are reaching growing numbers of affected people. The vast majority of displaced people in northern Shan (82,000) have now received assistance and work continues to expand the response in other impacted areas such as the Northwest where 50,000 people have already been reached. A rapid response allocation of US\$7 million from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) will provide survival support to people most affected in the coming weeks.

Humanitarian Needs and Response

Northeast

- **In northern Shan**, the conflict remains persistent with fighting continuing across several townships, despite reports that discussions around a possible ceasefire have been held between parties to the conflict. Clashes intensified in some townships since the last update with heavy use of airstrikes and artillery shelling during the past week with unverified reports indicating that a total of 130 civilians have been killed, and another 210 injured since the fighting escalated. More than 430 houses and other public assets have been damaged or destroyed.
- Since 27 October, nearly 120,000 people have been forced to flee their homes to safer locations. About 20,000 people have since returned home leaving some 99,000 people displaced in 187 sites mostly within northern Shan, as well as in neighboring Kachin and Mandalay. The newly displaced people are predominantly being sheltered in religious compounds, host communities, or are staying in informal sites in forested areas or paddy fields near the China-Myanmar border.
- Humanitarian partners have had access to 139 sites (74 per cent), although urgent rapid needs assessments have been challenging due to ongoing fighting, access restrictions and bureaucratic impediments. Close to 82,000 IDPs (82 per cent of all those displaced) in northern Shan are estimated to have received essential humanitarian assistance, mostly in the form of multi-purpose cash assistance, food and essential relief items and services. An estimated 30,000 IDPs at the China-Myanmar border (down from 40,000 a week ago) remain in need with minimal humanitarian access.
- An inter-agency mission succeeded in reaching some locations in Wa last week to assess the situation but was not able to reach those on the border.
- Increasing inflation and depreciation of local currency, as well as cash liquidity have reduced the purchasing power of cash assistance.
- Lashio Airport has been closed for seven weeks, while accessibility of major routes remains limited.
- **In Kachin**, the security situation remains unstable with random artillery fire, as well as troop movement and recruitment of civilians reported in several townships, including the state capital, Myitkyina, over recent weeks.
- Fighting between the MAF and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has been intense in Momauk Township on the major road between Bhamo and Myitkyina towns since 13 December. There have not been any reports of significant displacement.
- Two critical roads between Mandalay and Myitkyina are being frequently blocked by armed groups and the price of basic commodities including food and fuel has been surging for more than a month.
- Telecommunications and internet services in Kachin have been extremely unreliable, with limited or no access in some areas, hampering all communications, including between humanitarian partners.

Rakhine and southern Chin

- **In Rakhine and southern Chin**, armed clashes between the MAF and the Arakan Army (AA) remain intense in Maungdaw, Mrauk-U, Pauktaw and Paletwa townships during the past week. Almost all townships have seen frequent artillery fire, except for Sittwe and a few townships in southern Rakhine.
- The hostilities have caused a surge in civilian casualties; 37 fatalities and 121 injuries were reported between 13 November and 11 December. Since the ceasefire broke down, arbitrary arrests have escalated across Rakhine, with more than 190 people placed in detention for alleged affiliation to opposite party to the conflict.
- More than 111,000 people have been newly displaced due to the ongoing fighting. This is in addition to more than 205,000 Rakhine and Rohingya IDPs, who have been displaced by previous AA-MAF conflict and violence across Rakhine and Paletwa township in southern Chin.

- The lack of security and ongoing access restrictions continue to severely impede humanitarian activities. A number of humanitarian personnel have themselves been affected, arrested, or displaced. Despite these significant access challenges and safety risks, some local responders and religious networks are managing to provide limited aid to some affected families.
- Humanitarians are deeply concerned about interruptions to services for vulnerable people who were already in need even before the current surge in fighting and facilitation of regular assistance is needed so that more lives are not lost.
- Roads and waterways into and within Rakhine remain closed, and both public and private transportation are still suspended, impacting the flow of commercial commodities such as fuel, food, medical supplies, and items intended for humanitarian assistance. Depleted fuel stocks are affecting a broad spectrum of activities, including transportation, telecommunications, agricultural, and industrial sectors.
- Food scarcity and a consequent sharp increase in the cost of essential household items remains a major issue, particularly in northern Rakhine, impacting low-income families and the most vulnerable. In conflict-affected areas, the unfinished harvest has further exacerbated the need for those still reeling from Cyclone Mocha.

Northwest and central Myanmar

- **In the Northwest and central Myanmar**, intense armed clashes and violence have taken place in multiple townships, including Ayadaw and Indaw in Sagaing; Pakokku and Pwintbyu in Magway; and Kyaukse, Natogyi and Taungtha in Mandalay over recent weeks. Indiscriminate shelling and airstrikes were reported in urban areas of Kawlin and Tigyaing townships in Sagaing during the first week of December.
- Despite small-scale returns, the number of people displaced since the escalation began has increased to more than 314,000 across the Northwest and central Myanmar. This includes the fresh displacement of approximately 130,000 people from Kawlin and Tigyaing townships and more than 7,000 people Khampat Town in Sagaing and Tilin and Yaw townships in Magway since early December.
- The ongoing conflict has reportedly resulted in the deaths of 118 civilians and injuries to an additional 73 people. An estimated 553 homes, religious buildings and schools have been destroyed. In addition, arbitrary arrests are continuing at checkpoints and during military operations; some 110 civilians have been reportedly arrested in Kale and Monya townships in Sagaing since early December.
- Humanitarian partners have provided emergency assistance, mostly multi-purpose cash, to nearly 50,000 IDPs in Chin, Mandalay, Magway and Sagaing, although needs continue to far outstrip response capacity. Humanitarian access to affected people remains extremely challenging due to ongoing fighting, threats to safety and security of humanitarian workers, road closures, movement restrictions, lack of travel authorizations, further complicated by a fuel crisis and serious banking issues.
- An estimated 150,000 IDPs in Kawlin and Tigyaing townships in northern part of Sagaing have no access to humanitarian assistance and partners are exploring avenues for potential response in this area.

Southeast

- **In the Southeast**, intensified armed conflict has been seen in multiple townships across all states and regions since 11 November. Fighting has been intense in eastern Bago, Kayah and southern Shan, Mon, Kayin and Tanintharyi for more than a month, with heavy deployment of artillery shelling, aerial bombardment and shootings, as well as drone attacks. Since 11 November, the indiscriminate use of small and heavy weapons has resulted in the reported deaths of 93 civilians and injuries to an additional 101 people, many of them along the Shan-Kayah border.
- More than 136,000 people are verified to have been newly displaced between 31 October and 11 December.
- Amid growing needs, humanitarian agencies, in coordination with religious leaders and other stakeholders, are providing aid using a range of approaches.
- Humanitarian access remains heavily restricted in most parts of the Southeast.
- Movement of people and transportation of essential commodities remains heavily restricted, especially into Kayah.
- An inter-agency multi-sectoral distribution of humanitarian assistance to 11,000 IDPs has been approved in centers across six townships (Hopong, Hsihseng, Kalaw, Nyaungshwe, Pinlaung and Taunggyi).

Key Challenges, Gaps and Messages

- Humanitarians are deeply concerned by the escalation in conflict since the end of October and the dangers this is presenting to civilians and aid workers, particularly in terms of the use of aerial bombardment in urban areas. The principles of distinction between combatants and civilians, and proportionality must be adhered to.
- People seeking safety should be allowed safe passage and offered protection. They should not be turned around from communities and religious sites offering them refuge.
- Humanitarians urgently need access to communities affected by the recent fighting, as well as to those who were already in need before this wave of conflict, in order to provide life-saving assistance and save civilian lives.

- Disruptions to telecommunication services are hindering engagement with affected communities and the assessment of their emerging needs which are essential for guiding the humanitarian response.
- Shortages of cash and commodities, combined with the rising costs of essential items in conflict-affected areas, are straining the resources of host communities already supporting new IDPs.
- An urgent injection of funding is critically needed to allow humanitarians to respond effectively to escalating needs at scale.

*** Information in this update is based on initial inputs from humanitarian partners on the ground. The situation is fluid and estimated figures are subject to change.*

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