

Refugee Influx: Tak province, Thailand

31 December 2021

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 30 December 2021, the total accumulated figures since 16 December are 8,419 arrivals into Thailand and 3,637 returns to Myanmar.

There are currently **4,782 individuals remaining in two official temporary safety areas**. The vast majority (4,730 individuals) are accommodated at the Mae Kone Kane site, also known as Mahawan Moei Khong cow shed, in Mae Sot district. A small group (52 individuals) is hosted at the Muen Rue Chai monastery, in Phop Phra district.

Previously, there were other official sites which were closed after the authorities relocated the population to the two sites remaining. The emptied and 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), and Mae Ku Luang site, also known as Mae Ku Mai Tha Sung (closed on 28 December). Unconfirmed and unofficial reports suggest that further groups, possibly of hundreds of people, are staying in areas close to the border on both the Thai and Myanmar sides in Tak.



CURRENT SITUATION

The situation at the border has been volatile since mid-December. Shelling and crossfires could be heard from Mae Sot, while bullets and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) projectiles were found to have landed on the Thai side in Ban Don Chai on Christmas day. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) has inspected the damage and deployed reinforcements to Mae Sot to tighten security. Since 28 December, the TPBCC reported no clashes along the border, however, there continues to be new arrivals. The position taken by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and the RTA is that the situation of influx is temporary, and it is not expected that another temporary safety area will be established. In a statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a press conference on 27 December, the RTG mentioned that it is coordinating with UNHCR and I/NGOs on humanitarian assistance. At an operational level, however, access to the temporary safety areas has not been granted officially to UNHCR or any I/NGOs at the time of reporting.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Inter-sector coordination is led by UNHCR. The Field Inter-Sector Working Group (FISWG) in Mae Sot is functioning and convenes regular meetings to share updates on the situation and humanitarian assistance to ensure a coordinated implementation of the response plans to the extent possible and needed. The FISWG is exploring ways to carry out rapid needs assessments (RNAs) remotely. The need to understand and assess the situation on the ground is clear, however, conducting interviews to gather important information poses a serious challenge without formal access being granted. Given that UNHCR and partners have no formal access, Non-Food Items are being given to the district authorities and at the collection centers designated by the RTG authorities.



PROTECTION

UNHCR leads the protection sector. Together with partners, the protection sector is establishing safe spaces for women and children, in line with emergency camp management guidelines. Protection monitoring and identification of persons with specific needs is being done remotely, including through community-based organizations, within existing limitations. Some material assistance has been provided to persons with disabilities. Dignity kits have also been provided.



EDUCATION

Save the Children (SCI) and Teacher Focus, as education sector leads, are working with local community-based organizations. Clothes, diapers, and other materials were distributed to children at Mae Kone Kane and Muen Rue Chai. The sector leads will continue discussions with the RTG's Ministry of Public Health and Mae Sot hospital for specific data on age groups.



HEALTH

International Rescue Committee (IRC), health sector lead, has partial access to Mae Kone Kane and other unofficial sites. IRC stays in support of medical teams from the RTG, local hospital and health stations to provide care. Hospital referrals are available for serious cases. There is so far no known case of COVID-19 reported. IRC is assessing the exact medical needs onsite.



FOOD

The Border Consortium (TBC), food sector lead, has been providing boxed meals to Mae Kone Kane and all other previous sites with the exception of Muen Rue Chai, where a community kitchen is available. Expansion of community kitchens at Mae Kone Kane is a priority. Cooking commodities and volunteers are being arranged and approvals for setting up is ongoing.



WASH

IRC is WASH sector lead. Water supplies for the main Mae Kone Kane site are drawn from the river using water trucks. IRC has so far provided hygiene items, latrines, water containers and water tanks at Mae Kone Kane and the now-closed sites. Water tanks provided to old sites were transferred following the relocations.



TBC, as shelter sector lead, has been supporting sites with 'event' tents, including installation and transfer to new sites as old sites closed. Mae Kone Kane now has sufficient shelter, which is, however, only suitable for temporary stay; space is contingent on the number of new arrivals. TBC is on standby for shelter assistance where necessary since the situation changes rapidly.



UNHCR, as NFI sector lead, has been working with the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) and has provided sleeping mats, blankets, buckets, pots, pans, steamers, gas canisters and stoves for community kitchens.

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.

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](#)