European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Myanmar/Burma

Introduction

Myanmar is the country with the highest risk of humanitarian crises in Southeast Asia and ranks 14th worldwide (InfoRM 2019). More than 276 000 people currently live in camps in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine and Kayin States for internally displaced with limited access to basic services. Restricted humanitarian access to several areas hampers the ability of international aid organisations to provide crucial assistance to people in need. Recurrent natural hazards also increase the vulnerability of residents in disaster-prone areas.

What are the needs?

The United Nations estimates that more than 941 000 people in the country are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, including those displaced in the conflict-torn states of Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan. Violence in northern Rakhine, which started on 25 August 2017, has so far forced more than 700 000 people from the minority Rohingya Muslim community to flee across the border into Bangladesh. An estimated 600 000 stateless Rohingyas are left in Rakhine state, 128 000 of whom remain confined to camps since 2012. They are deprived of basic rights, including freedom of movement.

Restricted access to large parts of Rakhine state, in particular the northern region, poses a significant challenge and has severely hampered the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid in the area. In August 2017, attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on several border guard posts sparked a disproportionate military reprisal campaign resulting in the forced displacement of over 700 000 people into Bangladesh.

Furthermore, the fighting between Myanmar Army and Arakan Army has resulted in the displacement of some 31 000 non-Rohingya populations in central part of Rakhine since December 2018.

In Kachin and Shan states, prolonged armed conflicts have also taken a heavy toll on the local population. To date, an estimated 106 400 people are still displaced following clashes between armed groups and security forces. Limited humanitarian access severely restricts humanitarian operations.
How are we helping?

In 2019, the European Union has allocated €9 million in humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of families affected by man-made disasters in Myanmar. In Rakhine state, the EU has worked with trusted humanitarian partners to address the protection, food, nutrition and health needs of the most vulnerable people, particularly in the northern townships. Following the outbreaks of violence in October 2016 and August 2017, which resulted in large-scale displacement of populations, the EU extended its humanitarian aid to all displaced people in need. Assistance is provided in the form of shelter, food, nutritional care, healthcare, water and sanitation, livelihoods support, coordination, education, and protection.

The EU also provides humanitarian aid to those affected or displaced by conflict in Kachin and northern Shan states. In addition to providing food, healthcare and shelter support to populations living in IDP camps, the EU has also contributed to mine-awareness projects and to the rehabilitation needs of victims of anti-personnel mines, as well as supporting the Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education.

The EU has also responded to a number of natural disasters in Myanmar over the past two decades. In the aftermath of the widespread flooding triggered by heavy monsoon rains in August 2018, the EU channelled €130 000 in humanitarian aid funding through the Myanmar Red Cross Society to address the most pressing needs of the worst affected populations through multi-purpose cash grants and distributions of hygiene kits. Additionally, in late May 2017, when cyclone Mora wreaked havoc across several areas along the country’s western coast, with Rakhine state being the hardest hit, the EU immediately allocated €500 000 to provide emergency relief assistance to the affected communities.

Another priority of EU humanitarian assistance in Myanmar is disaster risk reduction, which increases the resilience of the most vulnerable communities facing recurrent natural hazards. In line with the EU’s international commitments, the European Commission ensures that all its relevant actions lead to the reduction of disaster risks and to the improvement of communities’ resources for better preparedness to natural hazards. In this regard, €11.65 million have been allocated since 2010 for coastal flood-prone areas and urban earthquake risks measures, particularly in the financial capital of Yangon.

The European Commission, through its European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department, has been active in Myanmar since 1994. It has funded emergency relief programmes to assist victims of both conflict and natural disasters, with total funding in excess of €240 million. Since 2013, a total of €2.65 million has also been provided for emergency education to conflict-affected children.