European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Myanmar/Burma

Introduction

Myanmar is divided by active ethnic armed conflicts, causing grave human rights violations. More than 264,000 people, displaced by conflict and natural disasters, currently live in camps in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Chin, and Kayin States, 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 disasters 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 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 remain in Rakhine state, 128,000 of whom have been confined to camps and deprived of basic rights, including freedom of movement since 2012.

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.

Furthermore, the fighting between Myanmar Army and Arakan Army, an armed group in Rakhine, has resulted in the displacement of 32,000 non-Rohingya populations in Rakhine and Chin states 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 106,000 people are still displaced following clashes between armed groups and security forces. Limited humanitarian access severely restricts humanitarian operations.
In 2019, the European Union has allocated €9 million in humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of displaced and conflict-affected communities in Myanmar. In Rakhine state, the EU works 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 conflict and violence in August 2017, which resulted in the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar into Bangladesh, the EU extended its humanitarian aid to all displaced people in need. Assistance is provided in the form of food, nutritional care, healthcare, water and sanitation, 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, water and sanitation support to people living in displacement camps, the EU has also contributed to raising awareness on landmines, protection, and education in emergencies programming.

The EU has also responded to a number of natural disasters in Myanmar over the past 2 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 disasters. 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 disasters. 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 €249 million. Since 2013, a total of €4.65 million have also been provided for emergency education to conflict-affected children, including €2 million in 2019.