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## **Myanmar: Conflicts and human rights violations continue to cause displacement**

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*Displacement as a result of conflict and human rights violations continued in Myanmar in 2008. An estimated 66,000 people from ethnic minority communities in eastern Myanmar were forced to become displaced in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses. As of October 2008, there were at least 451,000 people reported to be internally displaced in the rural areas of eastern Myanmar. This is however a conservative figure, and there is no information available on figures for internally displaced people (IDPs) in several parts of the country.*

*In 2008, the displacement crisis continued to be most acute in Kayin (Karen) State in the east of the country where an intense offensive by the Myanmar army against ethnic insurgent groups had been ongoing since late 2005. As of October 2008, there were reportedly over 100,000 IDPs in the state.*

*New displacement was also reported in 2008 in western Myanmar's Chin State as a result of human rights violations and severe food insecurity. People also continued to be displaced in some parts of the country due to a combination of coercive measures such as forced labour and land confiscation that left them with no choice but to migrate, often in the context of state-sponsored development initiatives.*

*IDPs living in the areas of Myanmar still affected by armed conflict between the army and insurgent groups remained the most vulnerable, with their priority needs tending to be related to physical security, food, shelter, health and education. Humanitarian access to this population continued to be very restricted.*

*An unprecedented level of access for humanitarian workers was permitted in response to Cyclone Nargis which struck the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) Delta in May 2008, but government restrictions on humanitarian access continued elsewhere in Myanmar and frustrated efforts to reach conflict-affected IDPs. Additionally, the awareness of the international community of the nature and extent of conflict-displacement in Myanmar continued to be limited.*



## Background

Intense international attention focused on Myanmar in May 2008 due to the humanitarian crisis created by Cyclone Nargis that struck the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) Delta region. The cyclone severely affected 2.4 million people and led to the initial displacement of 800,000 people. After it became clear that the military government, currently known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), was not immediately opening up international access to affected areas, international pressure increased and after a series of diplomatic initiatives, a meeting between UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Senior General Than Shwe led to a commitment to allow access to affected areas. The international assistance was to be facilitated through a coordination mechanism led by the Association of South-East Asian Nations or ASEAN (Belanger and Horsey, ODI-HPN, December 2008, pp.3-4). Aid agencies have subsequently delivered assistance thanks to an unprecedented level of access and mobility in the Delta, and international organisations have reported access to any requested part, including ethnic minority areas, and the ability to send international staff to train, implement and monitor programmes without obstruction (RI, 5 September 2008).

The situation, however, remains very different for those internally displaced as a result of conflict between government forces and ethnic insurgent groups in Myanmar, and by associated human rights violations. Since independence from Britain in 1948, Myanmar has been subject to armed conflicts, in the form of a communist insurgency and a series of inter-linked ethnic rebellions. In 1989, the Communist

Party of Burma collapsed, allowing the army to concentrate its forces on ethnic insurgencies which by this time were mostly confined to the northern and eastern border areas (University of Oxford RSC, February 2007, p.3).

Between 1989 and 1995, ceasefires were agreed between the government and a majority of the armed ethnic groups. Currently only two significant insurgent organisations remain in armed conflict with the SPDC. However, the number of people displaced because of these or earlier conflicts for whom no durable solution has been found must be calculated in the millions, and includes vulnerable communities that have been living in displacement for decades (University of Oxford RSC, February 2007, pp.3-6). The most acutely vulnerable internally displaced people (IDPs) live in those areas of the country still affected by significant levels of armed conflict (University of Oxford RSC, February 2007, p.4).

There continues to be limited awareness among the international community about the scale of this conflict and related displacement crisis, even as at least half a million people are estimated to be currently living as IDPs in eastern Myanmar. Despite concessions made in the Ayeyarwady Delta after Cyclone Nargis, restrictions on humanitarian access have continued elsewhere in Myanmar and frustrated efforts to reach conflict-affected IDPs (TBBC, FMR, December 2008, p.14).

## Causes of displacement

The scale of internal displacement in Myanmar remains difficult to accurately

assess due to the political sensitivities of the government and impossible to assess in areas under the government's control (TBBC, October 2008, p.8). The impact of the conflicts, and government policies including counter-insurgency strategies, on the enjoyment of human rights of civilians and IDPs in particular have been documented in areas of eastern Myanmar.

According to Refugees International in May 2007, the SPDC has been the biggest perpetrator of human rights violations in the country, while to a lesser extent abuses have been carried out by ethnic insurgent groups. These groups have positioned themselves as the defenders of minority populations against the aggression of state forces. However they have been unable to defend civilians against government action in retaliation to their guerilla tactics. Since the 1960s, in response to protracted insurgencies in most ethnic minority areas, the army or *Tatmadaw* has often pursued brutal counter-insurgency strategies, including the forced relocation of civilian populations (ANU, June 2007).

The Karen National Union (KNU) and other insurgent groups have an interest in controlling, or at least maintaining, civilian populations in traditional ethnic lands, as a source of legitimacy, and of food, intelligence, soldiers and porters. On this basis they bear some responsibility for the plight of civilians in areas where they operate. For nearly 60 years, they have fought an armed conflict against the central government although the possibility of any military victory ended several years ago. Nevertheless most forms of displacement and associated human rights abuses still occur in the context of the *Tatmadaw's* "four

cuts" counter-insurgency strategy which aims to prevent the armed opposition groups' access to supplies, information, recruits and food (ANU, June 2007).

According to Amnesty International, since at least the early 1980s, civilians in areas of ongoing conflict in Myanmar have been relocated to fenced settlements known as relocation sites. Villagers are characteristically given short notice periods prior to relocation, and villages may be burned down and mined in order to prevent return. Members of the army have in many reported cases shot and killed people found in their villages after the expiry of the notice period. Villagers have reported being told that they would be killed if they fail to comply with relocation orders, and that anyone who remained would be taken to be supporters of armed oppositions groups and therefore treated as a legitimate military target during counter-insurgency operations or combat (AI, June 2008, p.26).

In order to avoid going to relocation sites, some villagers have fled into the jungle, sometimes to hiding places prepared in advance. They flee with only what they can carry, such as infant children, utensils, blankets, plastic sheeting, and a few days' supply of rice. Once the offensive is over and troops have returned to their camps, some villagers have tried to return to or near their fields and villages, while others have remained displaced in hiding for longer periods (Eubank, FMR, April 2008, p.11).

Besides direct relocation or eviction orders issued by the military and civil authorities, internal displacement in Myanmar results from a combination of coercive measures, such as forced labour,

extortion and land confiscation, which drive down incomes to the point that people have no choice but to leave their homes (UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 7 March 2008, p.17). Displacement has also occurred in the context of state-sponsored development initiatives that have been closely related to militarisation, with ethnic communities generally bearing a disproportionate share of the impact and being denied a fair share of the benefits (TBBC, October 2008, p.8).

### **Displacement in eastern Myanmar**

According to the 2008 survey by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), field surveys by local humanitarian and human rights groups indicated that more than 3,200 villages had been destroyed, forcibly relocated or otherwise abandoned in eastern Myanmar between 1996 and 2007. In 2008, community organisations documented the destruction, forced relocation and abandonment of a further 142 villages and hiding sites. The majority of these areas were located in the contested regions of northern Kayin (Karen) State and eastern Bago (Pegu) Division. Forced relocations were also prominent in the politically sensitive townships surrounding Laikha in southern Shan State (TBBC, October 2008, p.18).

An estimated 66,000 people were forced to become displaced as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict and human rights abuses between October 2007 and October 2008. The estimates have been derived by TBBC from the rural areas of 38 townships most affected by forced migration, and do not contain figures from urban areas or mixed administration areas.

According to TBBC, while the total number of IDPs in eastern Myanmar's Kayin State, Kayah (Karenni) State, Shan State, Mon State, Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Division and Bago Division was likely to be well over half a million, there were at least an estimated 451,000 displaced people in the rural areas in 2008. This population included 224,000 people living in temporary settlements in ceasefire areas administered by ethnic nationalities, another 101,000 civilians estimated to be hiding from the SPDC in areas most affected by military skirmishes, and approximately 126,000 villagers who had followed government eviction orders and moved to designated relocation sites. These figures suggested a ten per cent reduction in the IDP population compared to 2007, due to the estimated fall of over 70,000 in the number of IDPs in ceasefire areas. Meanwhile, however, estimates for IDPs in hiding and in relocation sites had increased from 2007 to 2008 (TBBC, October 2008, p.20).

In Kayin State, a military offensive has been ongoing since late 2005. According to Amnesty International, unlike previous SPDC counter-insurgency campaigns against the KNU and its armed wing the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the current offensive has civilians as its primary target. The current operation is the largest in a decade and unlike former seasonal operations, this offensive has continued through the rainy season. Since November 2005, more than 140,000 Karen civilians have experienced violations of human rights and humanitarian law (AI, June 2008, p.2). As of October 2008, there were at least 104,900 IDPs in Kayin State (TBBC, October 2008, p.21). The SPDC contin-

ued to fight for control of the northern hills of Kayin State and surrounding territories, where the KNU/KNLA has stronger presence than in other areas and where many Karen civilians live (AI, June 2008, p.2).

Displaced villagers in hiding in Toungoo district of Kayin State were prevented from cultivating their fields due to the risk of being shot on sight by the *Tatmadaw*, while those living under military control had to endure regular forced labour and strict controls on their movements (KHRG, 1 July 2008, p.1). In Nyaunglebin district, forced relocations by the SPDC served to depopulate hill areas and concentrate the civilian population in the plains areas (KHRG, January 2009). In much of eastern Pa'an and north-eastern Dooplaya districts of Kayin State, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a proxy force for the *Tatmadaw*, has conducted an intensified military campaign since August 2008. In some cases the DKBA attacks have been employed as part of a forced relocation programme in which soldiers have burned down villages in order to prevent the return of villagers relocated to DKBA-controlled areas (KHRG, 6 February 2009, pp.1-2).

As of October 2008, at least 53,300 people remained displaced in Kayah State (TBBC, October 2008, p.21). Given that the population of Kayah State is estimated at 300,000, a significant percentage of the population in the state is living in displacement. In Kayah State ceasefire agreements between some ethnic groups and the government have created tensions, with ceasefire groups in some areas acting as proxy forces for the SPDC. Civilians in Kayah State were in 2008

facing oppression from the *Tatmadaw*, ceasefire groups aligned with the SPDC, as well as some members of the armed opposition Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) who had also committed human rights abuses against villagers (Burma Issues, March 2008, p.36).

According to Burma Issues, the militarisation of Kayah State was increasingly linked to army efforts to secure sites for development projects and extraction of natural resources, while in previous years its aim had been to defeat the armed resistance movement. In order to secure complete control of some areas, Karenni villagers have been relocated and the army has launched patrols to search for villagers who are in hiding and resisting relocation orders. Once an area has been depopulated, or the population is in a relocation site, the SPDC has reportedly moved to initiate development projects (Burma Issues, March 2008, pp.33-34).

One such project, construction of the proposed Wei Gyi dam along the Salween river, will affect 30,000 people in Kayah State. The dam site is an area of ongoing conflict between the SPDC and the KNPP. The SPDC has already depopulated the area along the river in Kayah State and only 28 villages remain from an original number of 85. The rationale behind the depopulation along the Salween has been preparation for the Wei Gyi dam (Salween Watch, August 2007, p.4).

Displacement was ongoing in 2008 in parts of Shan State, where the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) has not signed a ceasefire agreement with the government. In 1996, the *Tatmadaw* intensified its counter-insurgency strategy in central and southern Shan State. Forced reloca-

tions were accompanied by human rights violations against civilians by the army. The violations, coupled with ongoing conflict in areas of the state and failed economic policies that had drastically reduced agricultural production and increased poverty and food insecurity, had driven villagers from their homes and forced them to live as IDPs or as refugees or migrants in Thailand (Conflict and Health, 2008). More recently, large infrastructure projects and joint ventures in Shan State between the governments of Thailand and Myanmar have resulted in increased militarisation, accompanied by widespread abuses of civilians, displacing many more villagers (Conflict and Health, 2008).

According to the TBBC, there were over 135,000 IDPs in southern Shan State as of October 2008, and the four townships surrounding Laikha in southern Shan State were of particular concern. Armed skirmishes and *Tatmadaw* deployments had escalated in this area since a former battalion commander with the SSA-S surrendered in 2006. The *Tatmadaw* was attempting to assert its supremacy in the area by breaking communication links between the armed opposition to the south and ceasefire groups to the north. Over 13,000 civilians are estimated to have been displaced from their homes in this area during 2008 (TBBC, ODI-HPN, December 2008, p.30).

In Mon State, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) entered into a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC in 1995, but by 2001, an NMSP splinter group known as the Monland Restoration Party had started activities in the area between southern Ye and northern Tavoy. Another armed Mon splinter group known locally

as the “Chan Dein group” has also been active over the last five years. The relationship between the Mon splinter groups and local civilians remains complicated and the groups have committed human rights abuses. Mon villagers have often found themselves caught between the parties to the conflict and some have been forced to support the splinter group and then punished by the *Tatmadaw* for doing so (HURFOM, November 2008).

Mon civilians have not only undergone human rights violations as suspected supporters of splinter groups, but also continuing conscription for forced labour such as guard duty and portering services. As of 2008, land and properties had increasingly been confiscated without compensation since 2005 (Rehmonya, 5 August 2008). As of October 2008, 70,000 civilians remain internally displaced in Mon areas, a vast majority in the NMSP ceasefire areas (TBBC, October 2008, p.34).

According to the TBBC, in 2008, military rule left approximately 65,000 people internally displaced in Tanintharyi Division. The majority of the IDPs were living in government-controlled relocation sites which have been in place since the *Tatmadaw's* 1997 offensive against the Karen population of Tanintharyi. As a result of severe restrictions on access to fields and markets, there are few livelihood opportunities and the government's economic mismanagement has led to widespread poverty. Thousands of IDPs from relocation sites have fled to Thailand to seek employment over the last two years (TBBC, October 2008, p.36). Displacement in eastern Myanmar is being further fuelled by anti-personnel landmines which have been planted in

parts of ten of the 14 states and divisions of the country. Anti-personnel mines planted by both government forces and ethnic armed groups have injured and killed civilians in addition to enemy combatants. The *Tatmadaw* has laid mines close to areas of civilian activity and mines are allegedly used to dissuade people from returning to their native villages after forced eviction (International Campaign to Ban Landmines, ODI-HPN, December 2008, p.33). As of mid-2008, there were no humanitarian demining programmes within Myanmar (International Campaign to Ban Landmines, ODI-HPN, December 2008, p.33).

### **Displacement in western Myanmar**

There is little information available on internal displacement in western Myanmar, but local groups estimated that there were in 2007 approximately 80,000 IDPs in hiding or living in temporary settlement in jungles and mountainous areas of Rakhine (Arakan) State, as low-level armed conflict continued between the Arakan Liberation Army and the *Tatmadaw* (COHRE, November 2007, p.58).

In northern Rakhine State, the predominantly Muslim Rohingya people continue to be denied citizenship in Myanmar and struggled from multiple restrictions as a result of which large numbers have fled to Bangladesh, Malaysia and the Middle East. Since 2006, an increasing number of Rohingya have attempted to reach Malaysia through Thailand, and according to reports emerging in early 2009, Thai authorities have detained them and towed their boats with no engines out to sea (AP, 13 February 2009).

The land of many Rohingya people has been confiscated by the army for the establishment of *Tatmadaw* farms and businesses. Confiscated land has also served to accommodate the creation of “model villages” which house communities forcibly resettled from other parts of the country as part of a scheme to remodel the demographics of northern Rakhine State (COHRE, November 2007, p.71).

In Chin State, the Chin National Front and its armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), is active as a resistance movement, although the operations of the CNA have been considerably reduced (HRW, January 2009, p.13). According to Human Rights Watch, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, forced labour, torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful and prolonged detention and attacks on religious freedom are some of the violations perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw* in the state (HRW, January 2009, p.25). In Palweta township of southern Chin State, villagers are reported to have been forced into hiding by the army’s demands, for example that villagers carry supplies for them, build new camps, and provide food and jatropha seeds for the troops. The demands, in addition to restrictions placed on farming, have forced 4,000 people in the area to flee to the forests (FBR, November 2008).

The humanitarian situation in Chin State has worsened in recent years due to severe food insecurity caused by the destruction of crops by an infestation of rats (IRIN, 3 February 2009). The food insecurity is being exacerbated by government policies, such as pervasive use of civilian forced labour, which have interfered with villagers’ traditional cultivation and farming methods and prevented

them from working to sustain their families. In addition to many people fleeing to neighbouring India, internal migration has been reported from areas such as Thantlang and Tonzang townships (CHRO, July 2008, p.10).

### **Humanitarian and protection situation of the IDPs**

Many civilians in eastern Myanmar live with the constant possibility of military attacks and have planned for repeated flight from their villages by setting up shelters hidden in the surrounding forests. These sites are generally located near their villages to allow for quick access and return after troops have left. The structures set up in these hiding sites are generally simple bamboo shelters. If villagers need to stay longer, they may expand the settlement, setting up hillside paddy fields and building more durable structures. Restrictions imposed by the army on travel and trade in and from areas outside its control severely obstruct the efforts of IDPs in hiding to address subsistence needs. As army patrols systematically destroy any hill fields they encounter, displaced villagers in hiding regularly lose their crops at various stages of the crop cycle. A continued army presence may prevent IDPs in hiding from accessing their fields at all, eliminating any possibility of even a limited harvest (KHRG, November 2008, p.134).

The relocation sites IDPs are taken to are located close to military camps, army bases and along main roads which may increase the vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. At these sites, they may be subjected to forced labour demands from soldiers and extortion (Burma Issues, March 2008, pp.77-78). Portering by

men, women and children is common and porters have been forced to accompany soldiers on military operations (AI, June 2008, p.30).

Conditions at relocation sites vary (HRW, June 2005), but some have been inadequate to sustain health and a viable livelihood. When IDPs have not been able to access productive land in the area, opportunities to farm have been limited. Some IDPs may have continued to live in relocation sites because the threat of human rights abuses is greater if they return to their villages (Burma Issues, March 2008, pp.77-78).

Within a few years of their establishment, most forcibly relocated communities have seemed to disperse, with the authorities turning a blind eye to their efforts to return to their original land or resettle elsewhere. In many cases conditions in relocation sites have gradually reached the standards of other villages in rural Myanmar, as people have rebuilt their communities in the new location, often in partnership with community-based organisations (CBOs) and local NGOs. In such instances, residents may have preferred to stay in the “new village” and avoid the uncertainties of return or resettlement elsewhere and the possibility of further displacement. Such rehabilitated relocation sites may offer better health and education services and access to markets than the remote villages which people were originally forced to vacate (University of Oxford RSC, February 2007, p.15).

IDPs in ceasefire areas face different risks as there is less active conflict. The ceasefire areas may have limited agricultural land, leading to food shortages, and IDPs may also face restrictions on

movement, preventing them from traveling to fields outside designated areas. The IDPs are not compensated for belongings, land or crops damaged during displacement (Burma Issues, March 2008, pp.77-78).

Some children who have been forcibly displaced from their villages have attended makeshift schools in the jungle. They usually study in the open and have no access to books and school supplies. Many of their teachers are not formally trained or adequately compensated for their efforts. Only some displaced children have had the chance to attend these makeshift schools, and others have had to abandon their education altogether. The displaced children may return to their villages after one or two weeks in the jungle, but then after a few months be forced to flee again. This pattern presents a serious impediment to their education (HREIB, November 2008, pp.76-78).

At many relocation sites, the authorities have made little effort to support the education of the forcibly displaced children, or to construct new schools. Travel to schools in neighbouring villages has been restricted, to prevent villagers evading military-imposed duties or even fleeing from the relocation site. Displaced children may have gone from a situation of being able to freely access schools prior to their forcible relocation into a situation where no such facilities exist (KHRG, April 2008, p.23).

The health conditions of displaced and non-displaced populations are very poor in areas of eastern Myanmar. Malaria is the most common cause of death, with more than 12 per cent of the population at any given time infected with its most

dangerous strain. Malnutrition is widespread, with more than 15 per cent of children showing evidence of at least mild malnutrition (ANU, 2008, p.211).

Surveys of IDPs in eastern Myanmar's active conflict zones have estimated maternal mortality at between 1,000 and 1,200 per 100,000 live births, and infant mortality and under-five mortality as 91 per 1,000 live births and 221 per 1,000 live births respectively. In Kayin State, a study on maternal health in non-ceasefire zones showed that the risk of anaemia was nearly three times higher for participants who reported forced relocation, and those reporting loss of food security had ten times the risk. Respondents who reported forced relocation were also almost six times less likely to receive any antenatal care (PLoS Med, 23 December 2008).

In western Myanmar, IDPs in Rakhine State have had insufficient food and clothing, no schooling and almost no international contact or support (COHRE, November 2007, p.58). The IDPs hiding in jungles in Chin State have experienced unstable and harsh living conditions, as well as malnutrition, which have exacerbated cases of diseases such as dysentery, pneumonia and malaria (FBR, November 2008).

### **National and international response to the displaced**

An unprecedented level of humanitarian space was carved in Myanmar in response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, particularly as a result of ASEAN proactively assuming a leadership role, both in convincing the Myanmar government to cooperate with the international community and in man-

aging the response itself (Belanger and Horsey, ODI-HPN, December 2008, p.5). Additionally the UN's cluster approach was activated to coordinate assistance to those displaced and affected by the cyclone (OCHA, 5 May 2008).

There has been significantly more humanitarian space in the Delta than in any other part of the country (Belanger and Horsey, ODI-HPN, December 2008, p.4) and the international community has continued to call upon the Government of Myanmar to "ensure timely, safe, full and unhindered access to all parts of Myanmar, including conflict and border areas, for the United Nations, international humanitarian organisations and their partners and to fully cooperate with those actors to ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered to all persons in need throughout the country"(UNGA Resolution 63/245, 23 January 2009, pp.4-5).

The Government of Myanmar does not recognise the existence of IDPs as a result of conflict and human rights violations within its borders, let alone its responsibility in preventing and addressing such a situation according to recognised international standards. It restricts access to the displaced, especially in the eastern border zones, by UN agencies and other humanitarian actors (UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 7 March 2008, p.16).

A great limitation on aid has been the lack of access to vulnerable populations, particularly in the conflict-affected areas in Kayin and Kayah states and Tanintharyi Division (ICG, 20 October 2008, p.29). Humanitarian agencies based inside Myanmar can reach more stable areas, including some IDP communities in

government-controlled relocation sites and ethnic ceasefire areas, but this assistance is limited. The Myanmar-based international organisations and UN agencies have generally taken a long-term incremental approach to expand their area of activity, starting programmes adjacent to state capitals and gradually moving into more remote locations, although not in the most severely conflict-affected areas. Very few international organisations operating in government-controlled areas of Myanmar implement programmes that specifically target IDPs. This is due to the sensitivity of the issue, as well as a lack of appreciation of the nature and extent of the displacement crisis in Myanmar (South, FMR, April 2008, p.18). While not targeting IDPs specifically may help overcome the issue of political sensitivity, it may also lead to their specific vulnerabilities not being addressed.

Some Myanmar-based agencies have since the late 1990s been working in partnership with local NGOs and CBOs to gain access to vulnerable and remote communities. They have accessed conflict-affected areas, and their relief and development activities have taken the form of self-help initiatives undertaken by extended family and ethnic clan networks, as well as more systematic programmes. Relief aid has usually consisted of food, medical supplies and community rehabilitation and development activities. Three separate church-based networks working with IDPs have developed sophisticated capacities to assess needs, and monitor and evaluate the impact of assistance. Community leaders who have been able to engage with those holding power locally have also undertaken protection work to improve conditions for vulner-

able communities (South, FMR, April 2008, p.18).

Cross-border assistance has reached areas in Myanmar inaccessible to agencies operating from Yangon. In addition to those based in Thailand, some cross-border activities are being carried out from Bangladesh, India and China. Most cross-border groups based in Thailand work in Karen areas, but also in Mon and Karenni areas. Security and limited local capacity has led to much less work being undertaken in Shan State. Cross-border programmes provide aid which is impartial and distributed according to need but not neutral. The aid networks are closely associated with armed opposition groups on which they rely for security and logistical support (South, FMR, April 2008, p.18).

The cross-border assistance remains the main means of accessing IDP communities in the more unstable areas along the country's eastern border. The largest sector of cross-border assistance has been support for livelihoods, including food aid for IDPs in camps close to the border and cash transfers for communities deeper

inside the country. The other two main sectors are health and education, while smaller amounts of assistance go towards the protection of civilians caught in the conflict and the promotion of civil society. Despite the ongoing conflict, in some communities it has been possible to supplement emergency relief activities with social capital development and the rehabilitation of natural, physical or social assets (TBBC, FMR, April 2008, p.20).

The level of trust and dialogue between humanitarian agencies assisting IDPs from inside Myanmar and through cross-border means has increased significantly in the last few years. However, challenges remain with information-sharing and coordination between Myanmar-based and Thailand-based agencies, and while there is a minimal overlap in existing services, this is related primarily to restrictions on access and funding. Efforts need to be strengthened to overcome ongoing constraints facing agencies based in Myanmar and Thailand, such as logistical difficulties, political risks and budgetary concerns (TBBC, FMR, April 2008, pp.20-21).

*Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).*

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## **About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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