

# Myanmar



## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	At least 446,000
Percentage of total population	At least 0.9%
Start of current displacement situation	1962
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	Undetermined
New displacement	At least 73,000
Causes of displacement	Armed conflict, deliberate policy or practice of arbitrary displacement, human rights violations
Human development index	132



There are no accurate figures available on the total number of people displaced within Myanmar by armed conflict or human rights violations. At the end of 2010, it was estimated that 446,000 people were living in internal displacement due to armed conflict in the rural areas of eastern Myanmar. An estimated 125,000 IDPs were gathered in government-run relocation sites, 115,000 were dispersed in hiding areas in the jungle, and 206,000 were living in areas administered by different ethnic non-state armed groups who had concluded a ceasefire with the government. An unknown but significant number of people remained displaced in other parts of the country, including in towns and cities.

In 2010, those IDPs in hiding were the worst off in terms of their access to basic necessities and enjoyment of a range of other rights, and they were most at risk of having to flee again. However, the situation of IDPs also grew more unstable in ceasefire areas where armed conflict resumed, while many IDPs in relocation sites suffered because they had limited access to land, had to give much of their crops to the army, and were vulnerable to diseases due to inadequate sanitation and limited access to clean water.

Displacement in Myanmar has continued since the armed conflict began in the early 1960s. In the mid-1960s, the government introduced the “four cuts” policy to cut off insurgents’ access to food, money, intelligence information, and fighting personnel. The policy has been aimed at civilians in order to separate armed groups from their support bases, and has led to civilians’ displacement, including through forced relocation.

During the 1990s, several armed groups concluded ceasefire agreements with the government. In the areas controlled by these groups, fighting came to an end as a result, but displacement continued because of human rights violations by government forces.

Since 2009, the government has put pressure on these armed groups to transform into army-led militias known as “border guard forces”, and some of them have done so. This has led to new fighting and displacement, including in ceasefire areas, where civilians had previously enjoyed relative safety. In some of these areas, the army forcibly recruited civilians into militias. At least 73,000 people fled their homes in eastern Myanmar between mid-2009 and mid-2010.

For the first time since 1990, parliamentary and regional elections were held in November 2010, but they were widely

regarded as neither free nor fair. They resulted in the government’s Union Solidarity and Development Party and members of the armed forces dominating the national legislature and most regional legislatures. However, their dominance was less pronounced in the seven states in which people belonging to non-Burman ethnicities are in the majority, including the conflict and ceasefire areas in the east of the country. Importantly, some members of minorities won seats in a number of legislatures, which was expected to facilitate their political influence at least on local issues. On the other hand, some ethnic minority parties were excluded from participating in the elections, and some ethnic minorities are not represented in any of the legislatures.

Shortly after the elections, fighting in Kayin/Karen State between government forces and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) forced about 20,000 people to flee across the border into Thailand. It remains unknown how many people became displaced within Myanmar as a result. Many returned to their homes after the fighting stopped. Later that month, the KNLA clashed with a newly formed border guard force, again forcing hundreds of people to flee into Thailand. In November and December, the Thai army forcibly repatriated some of them, and some continued to go back and forth between Myanmar and Thailand as the intensity of the fighting varied.

In his report of September 2010, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar highlighted the importance of access for humanitarian assistance. In order to improve the situation of civilians in the conflict-affected areas in eastern Myanmar, the government would first have to acknowledge that people have been displaced due to armed conflict and grant humanitarian agencies access to conflict-induced IDPs. An end to the armed conflict and human rights violations can only come about if genuine reconciliation and power sharing between ethnic majority and minority communities is achieved.