



Interim Humanitarian Access Report | 2025



# Karen State

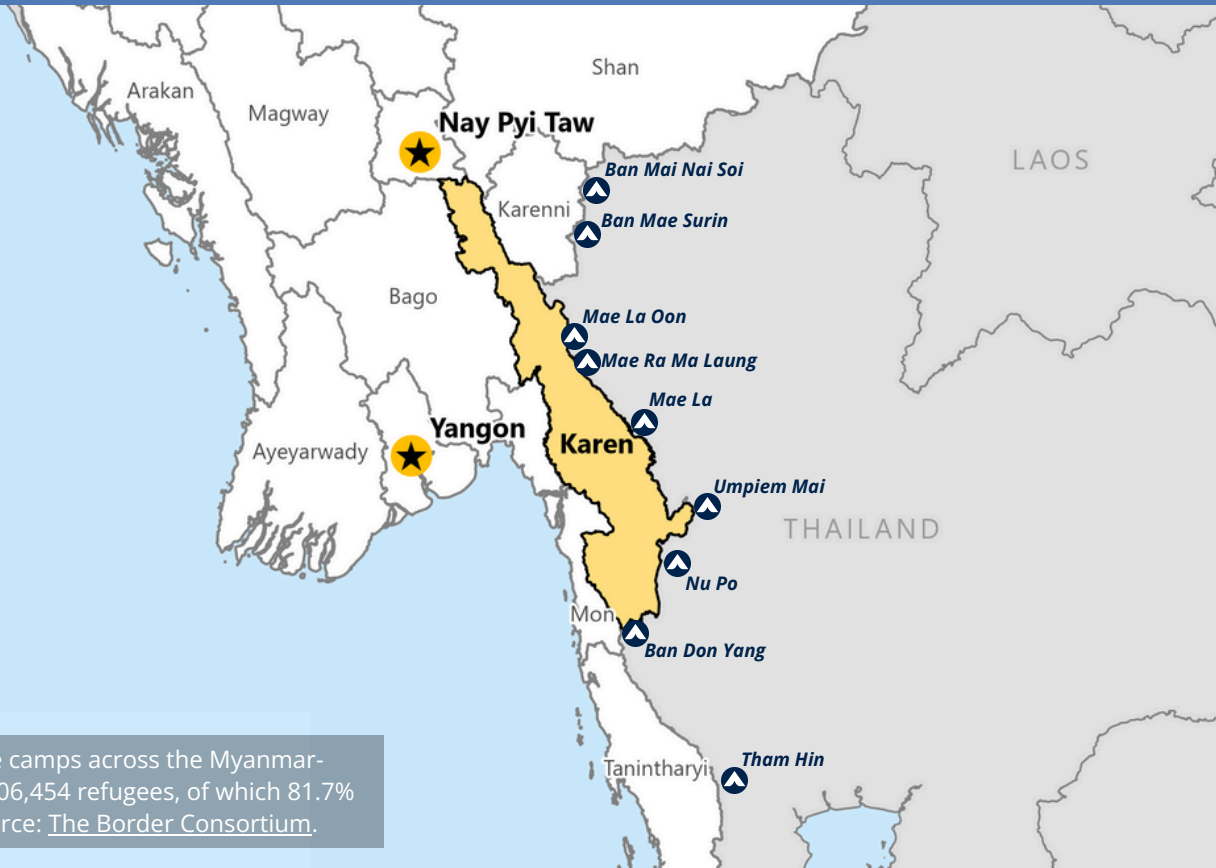
Myanmar

# Introduction

## Refugee Camp Populations

Ban Mai Nai Soi	9,275
Ban Mae Surin	3,117
Mae La Oon	12,029
Mae Ra Ma Laung	13,025
Mae La	37,711
Umpiem Mai	11,074
Nu Po	10,466
Ban Don Yang	3,015
Tham Hin	6,742

As of December 2024, nine camps across the Myanmar-Thailand border support 106,454 refugees, of which 81.7% are Karen by ethnicity. Source: [The Border Consortium](#).



This report provides a locally informed interim assessment of humanitarian access in Karen State (Kayin State per UN terminology), examining key constraints through insights from international actors and local community-based organisations (CBOs).

Global humanitarian efforts often rely on state authorities, sidelining local actors in conflict zones. In Myanmar, official aid is through the State Administrative Council (SAC) controlled NDMO, which has limited access and reliability for delivering aid to non-SAC-controlled areas, such as Karen State. SAC's bureaucratic barriers and movement restrictions further obstruct aid, while traditional INGOs and UN agencies have significantly less impact and reliable access in these resistance controlled areas.

By contrast, CBOs, local NGOs, Border Based Organisations (BBOs) and IDP humanitarian services under de facto authorities have proven to be the most effective existing channel for delivering aid—despite often operating outside the traditional humanitarian system. Through community networks, these actors consistently adapt to security risks and logistical challenges, ensuring aid reaches populations deemed inaccessible by conventional means.

This report finds that the most effective means of supporting conflict-affected communities is through local NGO and CBO stakeholders working with de facto authorities, who enable access and provide critical aid where traditional mechanisms fail.

This report provides an interim analysis of humanitarian access constraints and explores alternative pathways for aid delivery. The full report, covering all constraints listed on page 13, with additional risk related information for practitioners, will be released in late March 2025.

It will examine the following key humanitarian access considerations:

### 1. Presence of Mines and UXOs

- *Status of mines/ERWs per geographic area*

### 2. Physical Environment

- *State of Physical Infrastructure*
- *Climatic or other event temporarily affecting infrastructure*

### 3. Restriction/obstruction of services and assistance

- *Forced Movement of population away from locations of assistance*
- *Denial of movement to location of assistance*
- *Restriction on population movement*
- *Violence and administrative constraints*
- *Involuntary return to country of origin*
- *Prevention of use of services and assistance*

*In upholding our guiding principles, this report has incorporated the use of locally preferred terms, and local understanding of state geography.*



# Restrictions on Humanitarian Access, Aid and Services

Karen State, Myanmar | Date released, 31 Jan 25 [LDI: 08 Jan 25]

Access Report  
MMR/01/25

## Overview

Karen State faces severe humanitarian access constraints due to conflict, landmines, infrastructure destruction, and state-imposed movement restrictions. Aid delivery is severely obstructed, critical services are targeted, and forced displacement is increasing. Security risks, administrative barriers, and environmental hazards further isolate vulnerable populations. The most effective response relies on local networks, regional logistics, and geospatial and risk information sharing among trusted parties. Priorities include mine risk education, pre-positioning aid before monsoon season, and flexible, mobile response strategies to sustain humanitarian reach.



## 1. Presence of Mines and UXOs

### Status of mines/ERWs per geographic area

The entire state of Karen is **severely contaminated** by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), a situation compounded by newly planted and old devices from decades of violence in the region<sup>1</sup>. Myanmar recorded 1,003 landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) casualties in 2023, making it the highest-casualty country worldwide for the first time, surpassing Syria<sup>28</sup>. While armed groups primarily use landmines to secure territory and disrupt adversaries, civilians remain the primary victims, as landmines are often placed near villages and along roads<sup>1</sup>.

In 2023, **Mutraw, Hpa-An** and **Dooplaya** Districts had the **highest reported casualties** for Karen State<sup>3</sup>. For April, May and June 2024 (UNICEF's most recent reporting period), the southern half of Karen has recorded the most casualties<sup>4</sup>. However, due to communication and reporting limitations, the number of casualties is likely higher than the reported figures<sup>1</sup>.

The Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor recorded 545 casualties (410 civilian and 135 military) in 2022<sup>2</sup>, and the first six months of 2024 saw a total of 662 civilian casualties nationwide<sup>4</sup>. This figure represents 66% of the total number of casualties (1,052 civilians)



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from the previous year<sup>3</sup>. In 2023, Mutraw, Hpa-An, and Dooplaya Districts had the highest reported casualties for Karen State<sup>3</sup>. For April, May, and June 2024 (UNICEF's most recent reporting period), the southern half of Karen recorded the most casualties<sup>4</sup>. However, due to communication and reporting limitations, the number of casualties is likely higher than reported<sup>1</sup>.

Given the lack of reporting on contaminated sites, partnerships with community-based organisations (CBOs) already embedded in the region will be essential for local-area knowledge. Humanitarians operating in this environment should receive Explosives Hazard Awareness Training (EHAT).

**Assessment.** It is **almost certain** that **severe contamination will critically hamper** operations throughout 2025/26 in Karen State. Access, as it relates to Mines and UXOs, is expected to further deteriorate over 2025–2026, continuing the rising trend of incidents since 2022. The presence of mines and UXOs limits freedom of movement for people seeking aid and hinders humanitarian actors' ability to reach vulnerable populations—including those requiring life-saving medical attention due to landmine incidents.

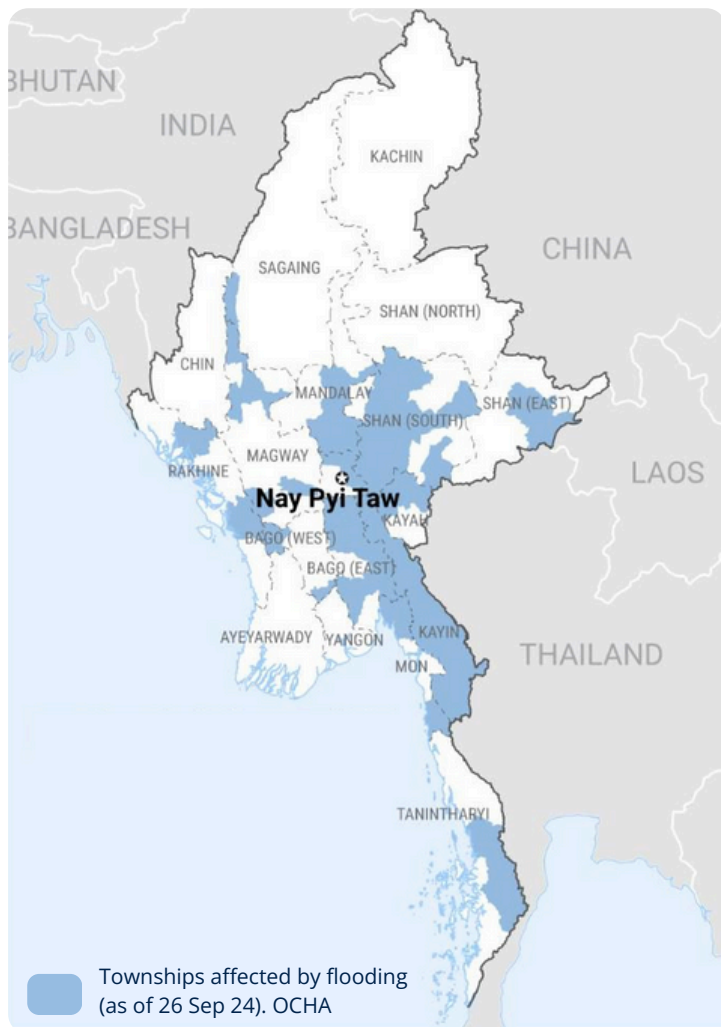


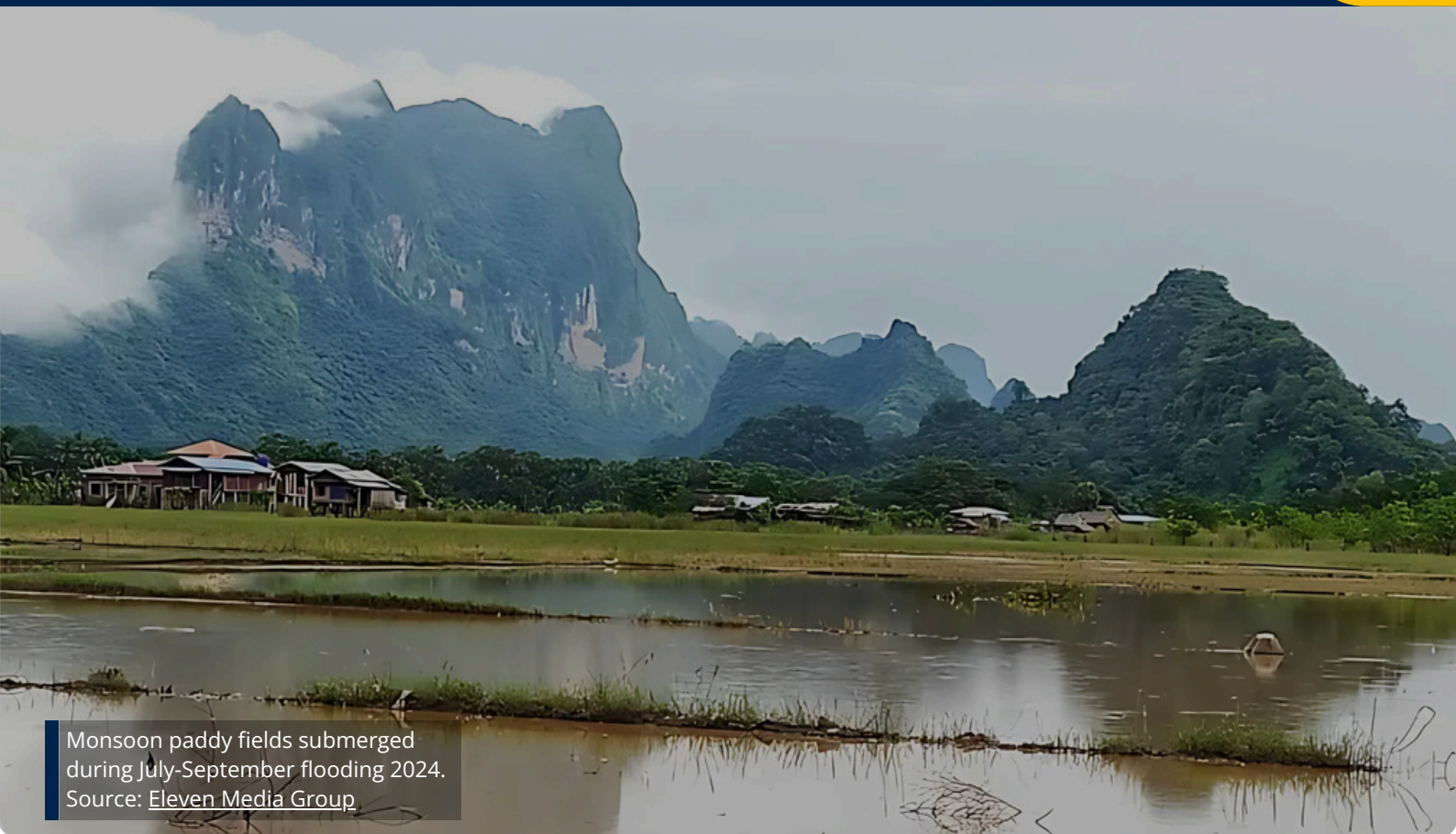
## 2. Physical Environment

### State of Physical Infrastructure

**Severe flooding** has caused **widespread destruction** of homes, water sources, electricity infrastructure, roads, bridges, communication networks, schools and public service facilities<sup>6</sup>. Conflict between the Junta and resistance forces has also contributed to damaged infrastructure, such as parts of the Asia Highway that connects Thailand with India through Myanmar<sup>7</sup>. Efforts to improve infrastructure have been undermined by conflict<sup>8</sup>.

**Assessment.** The state of Karen’s physical infrastructure is very likely to **highly constrain** humanitarian access and response operations for at least the next 12 months. Delays in repairing damaged infrastructure—caused by poor weather, supply shortages, funding constraints, and conflict—are likely to worsen access to healthcare, food security, clean water, and education<sup>9</sup>. It is probable that humanitarian organisations operating in Karen State will benefit from incorporating **geospatial data** alongside **local insights** to determine the state of physical infrastructure including roads, bridges and healthcare sites.





Monsoon paddy fields submerged during July-September flooding 2024. Source: [Eleven Media Group](#)

## 2. Physical Environment

### Climatic or other event temporarily affecting infrastructure

Karen State is still experiencing the impacts of Typhoon Yagi, which brought heavy rain and severe flooding to much of southeast Myanmar. While severe, typhoons and **heavy rain is not uncommon** for Karen, with its relative proximity to the coast resulting in **higher average annual rainfall compared to the central and hilly zones**. Peak average rainfall occurs in July and August which corresponds with monsoon season (May to October)<sup>10</sup>. While Myanmar's dry period is from November to April, tropical storms are more likely to occur in October-November and April-May<sup>10</sup>. Linked with these weather patterns are the risk of urban and **river flooding, landslides, extreme heat, and wildfires** which have a hazard level ranking of **'high' for nearly all areas** within Karen State<sup>11</sup>.

**Assessment.** Karen State is **highly susceptible** to natural hazards affecting infrastructure that **prevents population access to assistance**, including tropical storms leading to flooding, landslides and extreme heat.

These disasters affect population movement, damage infrastructure including healthcare facilities and water and waste management systems that can lead to **waterborne diseases** and **water insecurity**. It can also create conditions of **food insecurity** by affecting farmland and supply chains. It is **highly probable** that humanitarian operations will face major obstacles relating to climatic events for at least the next 12 months.

Humanitarian operations would **benefit from preparedness activities operating during Karen's dry season**, particularly from **December-April** when rainfall is typically at its lowest. Humanitarian operations should prioritise preparedness for **WASH, nutrition including staple items, healthcare, and emergency shelter**, targeting areas that remain heavily affected by the September 2024 flooding.



Photo taken on 21 July 2023 in Lu Thaw Township, Mutraw District shows school buildings destroyed by SAC airstrike. Source: [KHRG](#)

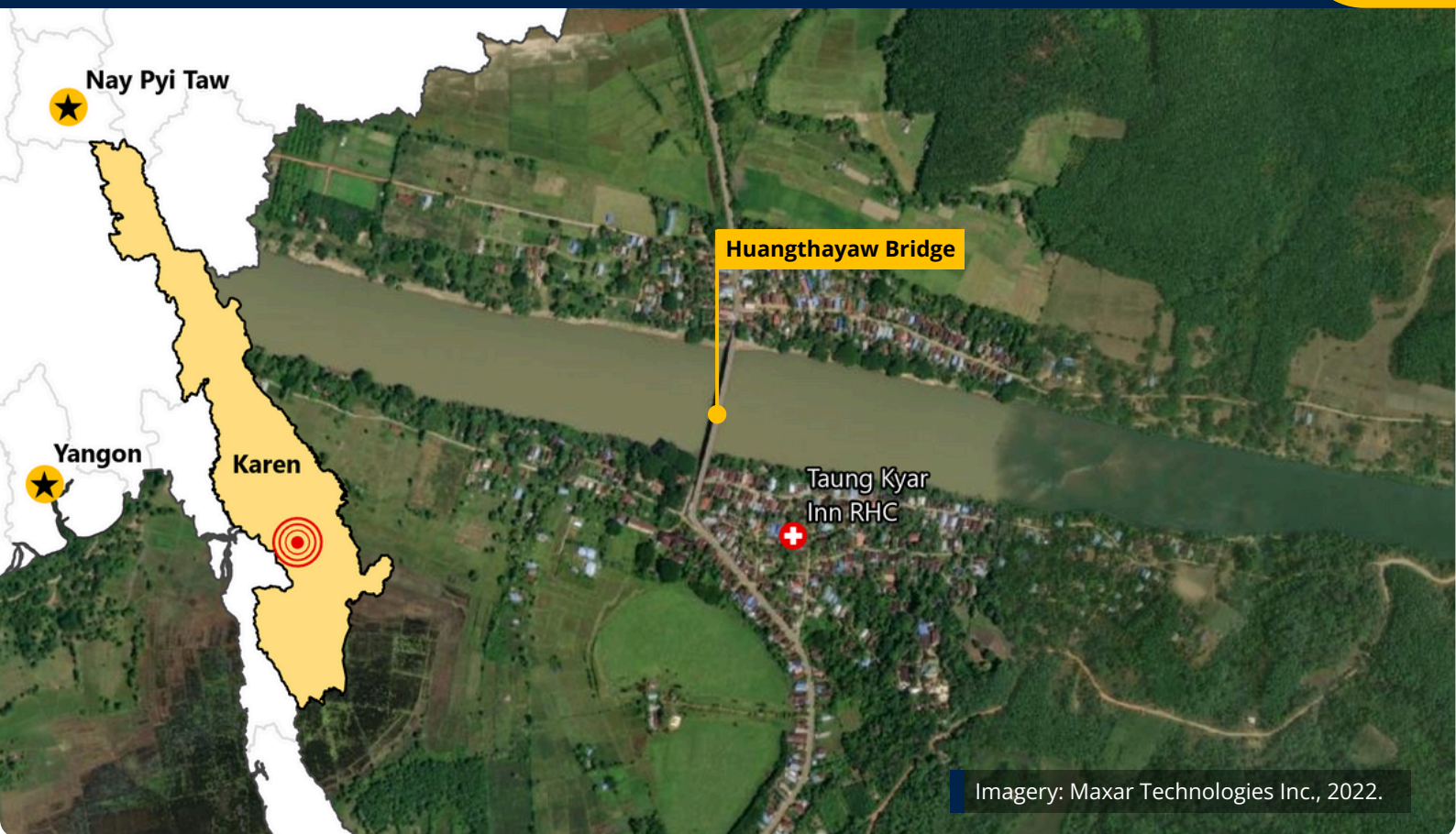
### 3. Restriction or Obstruction of Services and Assistance

#### Forced Movement of population away from locations of assistance

There have been a number of reported incidents of **attacks on**, and **occupation of**, aid and service facilities, including **schools and hospitals**. In November 2023, the military's occupation of a hospital in the No Ta Koh (Kyainseikgyi) township resulted in limited functioning hours before the hospital was closed down a week later<sup>12</sup>. On October 1, 2024, conflict damaged a school and a hospital in Dooplaya District forcing residents into hiding<sup>13</sup>. Shelter is often found in places far from locations of assistance such as in caves, forests and distant villages.

**Assessment.** It is **highly likely** that the forced movements of conflict affected populations away from locations of assistance will continue to **severely restrict access** for at least the next 12 months. These constraints are very likely to **increase the risk of deteriorating food security, education, physical and mental health**, and expose displaced populations to **further risk from landmines**

and long-term **livelihood/income vulnerabilities**. Centralised aid facilities are not protected from conflict, and vulnerable groups often reside in hard-to-reach areas. As a result, humanitarian access to services is very likely to be **severely impacted**. Border based humanitarian programs should collaborate with CBOs and defacto authority humanitarian service agencies, such as the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), and prioritise flexibility to adapt to changing conditions and diverse locations. The CIDKP currently is the primary local agency that is functionally supporting the majority of displaced people within Karen state.



### 3. Restriction or Obstruction of Services and Assistance

#### Denial of movement to location of assistance

On 14 May 2023, in central Karen, access to a hospital in Tuang Kyar Inn village was denied by the Military who destroyed roads and entry points into a town<sup>14</sup>.

**Assessment.** It is highly likely that conflict-affected populations access to services and assistance will continue to be severely restricted for the next 12 months and likely longer. The Junta's restrictions on the movement of goods and people in an attempt to control resistance groups creates **severe access restrictions** particularly for people living in proximity to contested areas. It is **highly probable** that humanitarian operations will be **severely constrained** during efforts to access conflict-affected populations. Developing **partnerships with CBO's** will be essential and international humanitarian actors are advised to **prioritise flexible regional support operations focused on enhancing local community capacities**; including **reliable and secure information access, risk management, coordination and secure/safe logistics chains**.

#### Restriction on population movement

Recent flooding has limited population movements due to damaged infrastructure including roads, bridges and communication towers.

**Assessment.** It is likely that physical constraints resulting from **climate** and **infrastructure damage** will *highly restrict population movement* for the at least next 12 months. Natural hazards, particularly during monsoon season (May to October) will bring increased risk of heavy rains, flooding, landslides and heatwaves, and is very likely to restrict assistance and humanitarian access to vulnerable and affected populations. For at least the first quarter of 2025, areas heavily affected by the September flooding are likely to remain impacted by delays to repair transport infrastructure. **Engaging CBOs will be essential to ascertain logistical access to remote areas** and it is recommended that humanitarian practitioners seek education relating to disaster specific aid and medical training (such as how to treat people with heatstroke) and risk management for response plans during flood and landslide incidents.



Students that fled to Thailand crossed back to Dooplaya District after being told by authorities that they cannot stay in Thailand. Source: [KHRG](#), December 2021

### 3. Restriction or Obstruction of Services and Assistance

#### Violence and administrative constraints

The Junta have used military checkpoints around the state, travel permits, roadblocks and violence to restrict movement of people, goods and weapons to suspected resistance groups<sup>14,15,16</sup>. In Hpa-An, the Junta is checking identity cards of youths fleeing conscription<sup>16</sup>. If identified, these youth are being detailed and arrested<sup>16</sup>. On May 14, 2023, the Junta destroyed a bridge between a village in central Karen and the Noh Ta Koh (Kyainseikgyi) township to deter transport of food and weapons by local resistance forces in the area<sup>14</sup>.

**Assessment.** It is very likely that strict restrictions, **administrative constraints and violence** will have a high impact on population movements to locations of assistance for at least the next 12 months. It is very likely that **humanitarian access will be severely impacted by restrictions on travel within certain areas of Karen State**. It is advised that humanitarian actors stay informed on current restricted access zones.

It is probable that collaborating with CBO's will be useful to ascertain checkpoint locations and getting access to restricted zones.

On-going fighting is severely restricting populations access to locations of assistance as well as impacting the transport of essential items such as food, medicines and fuel to affected populations. **Prolonged conflict and disruptions to supply chains is very likely to lead to deteriorating food security and health concerns for at least the next 12 months.** It is advised that humanitarian operations work alongside CBOs to determine the viability of providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people located in areas not controlled by the Junta.





People crossing the Moei River as they flee Myawaddy Township to Thailand's Mae Sot town, April 20, 2024. Source: [APNews](#)

### 3. Restriction or Obstruction of Services and Assistance

#### Involuntary return to country of origin/refoulement

Displaced people from Karen and neighbouring states are fleeing across the Myanmar-Thai border. Thailand observed stark increases in entries in the latter half of 2023 and early 2024<sup>17</sup>. This coincides with increased conflict events related to Operation 1025 and the Junta's conscription law in February 2024<sup>17</sup>. While Thai authorities have said they support humanitarian aid to villagers fleeing conflict, there are reports of people being involuntarily returned to Myanmar<sup>18,19</sup>. For example, newly arrived people, who are not registered, in two Thai refugee camps have been sent back<sup>20</sup>.

**Comment.** Field sources indicate that turn backs occur when refugees enter on mass. Smaller groups receive more tolerance from Thai local and national authorities.

**Assessment.** It is likely that severe on-going conflict will continue to force conflict-affected populations to flee across the border with Thailand. Field sources have indicated that IDPs often travel along the Myanmar-Thailand border and when conflict occurs they cross to safety and are **either returned involuntarily or voluntarily when the fighting stops**.

Humanitarian practitioners would benefit from working alongside Thai and Burmese CBO's for more informed knowledge on locations of vulnerable groups and common border crossings. Humanitarian actors are encouraged to support refugee centres in a coordinated manner on the Thai side of the border through WASH education and supplies, physical and mental health support, humanitarian protection, education and financial donations.



### 3. Restriction or Obstruction of Services and Assistance

#### Prevention of use of services and assistance

Locations of assistance and services, including schools, hospitals and places of worship have been directly and indirectly targeted by the Junta and resistance forces. Since July 2022, there have been 27 explosive weapons incidents (such as airstrikes) on protected sites in Karen<sup>21</sup>. People fear attending school and seeking assistance where the threat of violence is high<sup>22</sup>.

**Assessment.** It is very likely that conflict-affected populations will be prevented from accessing services and assistance as a result of on-going conflict for at least the next 12 months. Services such as schools and hospitals have been directly and indirectly affected by violence including blockades and infrastructure damage from airstrikes. This constraint is very likely to impact education and access to emergency and long-term healthcare.

Above: Villagers displaced in the jungle due to SAC airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling into their village. Source: [KHRG](#)

**15**

Artillery and aerial strikes affecting the education sector

**12**

Artillery and aerial strikes affecting the health sector

Given locations of assistance are generally unsafe areas to operate and may have limited operational capacity, it is probable that humanitarian actors will need to establish alternative places to administer aid. Humanitarian operations are advised to prioritise flexible and mobile activities that can readily adapt to changing ground conditions and permit greater mobility for reaching people in harder to access areas.



## Key Assessments

Amid ongoing armed conflict and two severe flood events, Karen faces high to severe humanitarian access constraints as a result of UXOs, severe weather and restrictions/obstructions to services. Key recommendations:

- Coordinate with CBOs and humanitarian functions of local de facto authorities, such as the CIDKP, to ensure a locally led approach.
- Implement Explosives Hazard Awareness Training (EHAT) for personnel and communities. This effort should be coordinated through locally sensitive informal CIVMIL functions.
- Support rendering safe UXO and ERW through locally sensitive informal CIVMIL channels.
- Strengthen flexible regional aid coordination and resourcing to reach displaced and vulnerable populations
- Use geospatial mapping tools to track infrastructure damage and share within trusted groups. This should build upon existing work that is underway.
- Develop information sharing, early warning and incident reporting/monitoring protocols and coordination in trusted groups to enhance humanitarian safety
- Humanitarian operations would benefit from operating during Karen's dry season, particularly from December-April when rainfall is typically at its lowest.
- For the next 6 months humanitarian operations should prioritise WASH, nutrition including staple items, healthcare, emergency shelter and non-food items targeting areas that remain heavily affected by the September 2024 flooding

**Mines and UXO.** The **severe** widespread contamination of mines and UXOs in Karen, particularly along roads and around villages, poses a significant risk for civilians accessing aid and humanitarian actors (primarily local agencies, CBOs, BBOs and regional organisations) delivering aid. These UXO & ERW risks will almost certainly remain a **severe** constraint for at least the next 12-24 months. Mutraw and Dooplaya Districts have the highest recorded mine/ERW casualties.

Avoiding mine and UXO contaminated land is near impossible in Karen, but actions to mitigate the risk can be taken, such as engaging local stakeholders who have a more informed understanding of the area and prioritising efforts to avoid areas with known mines and UXOs. It is highly probable that humanitarian actors working in the region would benefit from Explosives Hazard Awareness Training (EHAT). EHAT should be coordinated through local CIVMIL engagement. Humanitarian practitioners in the area should collaborate amongst trusted partnerships for risk related information sharing and hazard identification and support community education programs to enhance humanitarian protection efforts. Subject matter experts should be engaged to better education to enhance safety during operations for rendering UXOs safe.

**Climate.** Myanmar is extremely vulnerable to climate hazards including heatwaves, landslides, flooding and heavy rainfall, all of which significantly affect populations needs and infrastructure, and disrupt humanitarian access to vulnerable people and capacity to deliver aid and services. Climate and related hazards particularly from May to October due to heavy rains, and in October, November, April and May when tropical storms are more likely to occur are very likely to affect humanitarian access for at least the next 12 months.

Humanitarian operations would benefit from operating during Karen's dry season, particularly from December-April when rainfall is typically at its lowest. For the next 6 months humanitarian operations should prioritise WASH, nutrition including staple items, healthcare, emergency shelter and non-food items targeting areas that remain heavily affected by the September 2024 flooding. It is highly probable that communities would benefit from preparatory humanitarian activities, including vaccinations and the delivery of non-perishable supplies, ahead of monsoon season to support resilience and preparedness.



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This map shows district boundaries per the Karen Human Rights Group within state boundaries recognised by the Myanmar Information Management Unit. OCHA designates red areas as ‘very difficult to access,’ based on data from actors reliant on official channels requiring SAC collaboration. However, CBOs and local NGOs operate successfully, with Border Based Organisations (BBOs) often staging from Thailand, with endorsement and security from de facto Karen authorities.

**Infrastructure.** Infrastructure and services will very likely continue to be highly affected by both natural hazards and conflict for at least the next 12 months. Widespread destruction of roads and bridges along with farmland and other essential infrastructure caused by flooding in September increased conditions of food and water insecurity<sup>24</sup>. While OCHA lists Mutraw, Hpa-An and Dooplaya (see above map) as ‘very difficult to access’<sup>25</sup> through traditional humanitarian means, local CBOs and BBOs are more effective in accessing these areas. With on-going conflict and disruptions to infrastructure repairs, humanitarian access is very likely to remain impacted for at least the next 12 months. It is probable that conventional **humanitarian operations would undertake localised approaches and seeking informed local knowledge of access constraints.**

**Administrative constraints.** Strict administration restraints including travel permits, work permits, road blocks and checkpoints, are very likely to severely impact freedom of movement and delay and/or suspend humanitarian aid, particularly in resistance-held areas for at least the next 12 months. Foreigners and tourists require travel permissions to access thirteen towns, townships and remote areas across

Karen<sup>26</sup>. Due to political violence, aid delivered through formal channels is selectively distributed and unlikely to reach civilians in resistance-held areas. As a result, humanitarian operations often need to be carried out informally to support those most in need. Engaging with CBOs and de facto authorities is essential to navigating checkpoints and ensuring access to vulnerable groups, especially those in restricted zones.

**Locations of services/assistance.** Services such as schools and hospitals have been directly and indirectly targeted by conflict. Blockades, infrastructure damage, and supply shortages continue to degrade education and healthcare access. Centralised aid locations are often unsafe or non-functional, while vulnerable populations remain dispersed in remote, hard-to-reach areas.

In Karen State, humanitarian services operate without fixed locations due to targeting risks. Key agencies include the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW), the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), and the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), the main providers of social welfare and humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian activity is less reported in mountainous areas, particularly Mutraw, Hpa-An, and Dooplaya, where access constraints remain severe<sup>27</sup>.



## Humanitarian Access Constraints Indicator and Assessment

This interim report addresses only constraints marked in red, with assessed impacts highlighted in yellow. Future reports will expand coverage across Karen/Kayin State. It adopts non-colonial language, preferred terms, and local geographic understanding. Findings draw from open-source data, geospatial analysis, field research, and organisational interviews. For safety and security, field research and interviews are not attributable but were used to corroborate findings, ensure cultural sensitivity, and fill information gaps in alignment with best practices for research in conflict-sensitive manner.



	Minimal Impact	Low Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	Severe Impact
<b>Denial of humanitarian needs</b>	Negligible denial, minimal overall impact	Limited denial affecting small groups	Noticeable denial impacting significant minority	Widespread denial affecting large portion	Severe denial compromising overall response
<b>Restriction of movement into country</b>	Minor delays, negligible impact	Noticeable delays, some inconvenience	Moderate delays affecting timeliness	Significant delays impacting effectiveness	Severe restrictions critically hampering operations
<b>Restriction of movement within country</b>	Isolated restrictions, minimal impact	Localized restrictions in specific areas	Noticeable restrictions in multiple areas	Widespread restrictions limiting overall access	Severe restrictions, large areas inaccessible
<b>Military operations impeding activities</b>	Minor, short-term disruptions	Localized disruptions in specific areas	Noticeable disruptions in multiple areas	Significant disruptions, major ops suspended	Severe disruptions halting most activities
<b>Violence against personnel/assets</b>	Isolated incidents, minimal impact	Sporadic incidents causing concern	Recurring incidents impacting safety/ops	Frequent incidents compromising safety/delivery	Severe violence endangering staff/operations
<b>Interference in activities</b>	Minor interference, negligible impact	Noticeable interference in specific areas	Moderate interference in multiple activities	Significant interference compromising effectiveness	Severe interference undermining overall response
<b>Presence of Mines and UXOs</b>	Suspected presence, minimal impact	Confirmed presence, some adjustments needed	Noticeable presence, significant precautions	Widespread presence limiting access	Severe contamination critically hampering ops
<b>Physical environment obstacles</b>	Minor obstacles easily overcome	Noticeable obstacles, some adjustments	Moderate obstacles affecting certain areas	Major obstacles limiting access to large areas	Severe obstacles, areas virtually unreachable
<b>Restrictions on population's access</b>	Minor restrictions, few individuals affected	Noticeable restrictions on specific groups	Moderate restrictions on significant portion	Widespread restrictions for many affected	Severe restrictions for most of population

### Words of Estimative Probability

Almost no Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certainly
Remote	Highly Improbable	Improbable	Roughly Even	Probable	Highly Probable	Nearly Certain
01-05%	05-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

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