

## SMARTS PROJECT

Supporting Myanmar and Respecting Thai Sovereignty (SMARTS) Project



The military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 began a period of unrest and violence in the country leading to people fleeing their homes for safety. Many of these people fled to Myanmar's border areas and cannot return.

### Thailand's Approach

Thailand has a history of hosting long-term displaced persons from neighboring countries. However, the coup inside Myanmar has led to influxes of people seeking safety and shelter on the Thailand side of the border, especially areas along the Salween and Moei Rivers. Keen to avoid creating more dependent communities housed indefinitely on Thai soil, the Royal Thai government has maintained its standpoint that people seeking safety and shelter should not be allowed to stay for more than seventy-two hours. Furthermore, direct access to displaced communities by INGOs is not allowed under this policy. To be in line with the Royal Thai government policy, Diakonia and its partner adhere to the guidance provided.



Location of the Salween & Moei Rivers where Diakonia partners are active

**More than 800,000 people have become displaced since the coup in 2021.**

### Local Solutions

Temporary shelter in Thailand has been offered to the people fleeing the violence on the other side of the river. Host communities have received these people and provided immediate relief for the limited period that they are present. Food, immediate medical needs, and safety are priorities for people crossing to Thailand.

Diakonia and its partner the Legal Status Network Foundation (LSNF) are positioned to support these communities. With coordination of LSNF, construction of small-scale bunkers to reduce risks from stray shells or shrapnel has begun and distribution and response teams already have plans to meet the needs of the people. The host communities, with backing from the Thai military have provided support for the people crossing for shelter.

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Diakonia is a member of

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## A Shared Culture

Border communities along the Salween River have a shared way of life with much in common such as ethnicity and language, indeed their culture and their livelihoods are interwoven with the river itself. This great untamed river that forms the border between these two nations resembles a highway which connects communities on both sides of the border that divides them.

When airstrikes and attacks occur inside Myanmar people flee their communities, often to the safety and sanctuary of Thailand. This is because they know these communities, they are friends or relatives with similar ways of life. The familiarity of these communities is what drives people there in uncertain times. The Thai host communities that welcome these people for a limited period are all too aware of the dangers that are faced along the border, with stray shells and bullets occasionally landing on Thai soil. Taking precautions has unfortunately become part of their way of life.



**Travel along the Salween river**

***There are 980,00 refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar in neighbouring countries as of 31 December 2020***

## Coping Strategies



**Naw Lu Lu Thin nursery school teacher and humanitarian leader**

- This is a local solution for the communities which does not foster dependency on international agency's programmes and allows for solutions to be found that maintain Thailand's sovereignty.
- Community capacity will be used and supported with the crossriver coordination mechanism. This mechanism is for stakeholders to inform others of shelling inside Myanmar and locations of people fleeing to the river.

- This existing functioning community initiative, with local humanitarian leadership will serve to realize existing community capacity to manage needs of displaced people and refugees by strengthening partnerships with local Civil Society Organisations.

- For more information on how to strengthen local humanitarian leadership and provide support see our concept note on Supporting Myanmar and Respecting Thai Sovereignty (SMARTS) Project.



**Preparing food supply stocks for host villages**