



MYANMAR WITNESS

A project by



CENTRE for
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RESILIENCE

MONITORING MISSING PERSON ADVERTISEMENTS IN MYANMAR

Analysis of Impact Following Implementation of People's
Military Service Law in 2024



OAKAR FELLOWSHIP

Myanmar Witness

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Myanmar Witness investigated the correlation between the implementation of the conscription law and the increase in social media alerts for missing persons in Myanmar. The State Administration Council (SAC)¹ officially implemented the People's Military Service Law on 10 February 2024 to replenish military forces depleted by the ongoing nationwide conflict.

Myanmar Witness analysed 477 missing-person advertisements collected from Facebook between January 2021 and January 2025. Investigators carried out a focused pilot dataset examining January of each year, which provides a comparison across the pre- and post-implementation periods of the law.

Based on Myanmar Witness's investigation, the key findings indicate:

¹ The SAC was formally dissolved in July 2025 and replaced by a rebranded military governing body, commonly referred to as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC)



- Missing person notices for January rose from four in 2021 (pre-coup) to 82 in 2025.
- Yangon Region recorded the highest number of reported cases (163), followed by Mandalay (48) and Shan State (35).
- Around a total of 3,313 Myanmar citizens were reportedly repatriated from neighbouring countries between February 2024 and May 2025.
- Thailand accounted for 84.4% of total repatriations, with more than 2,500 individuals returned to Myanmar authorities.
- Case studies illustrate that individuals deported from Ranong, Thailand, were transferred to military battalions for training rather than being released to their homes.

The data collected also indicates that men and boys constitute the majority of reported missing persons. This reflects the legal structure of the conscription framework, which targets males of military age.

Additionally, supporting evidence from collected case studies and data suggests that some of the missing individuals were subsequently identified in military custody or training. This includes examples of forced recruitment either following detention or deportation from neighbouring countries.

The findings also show that the enforcement of the People's Military Service Law is associated with:

- A significant increase in missing person reports on social media
- A disproportionate impact on men and boys
- The use of detention, coercion and repatriation pathways to facilitate recruitment practices.

This report will highlight the mechanisms driving forced recruitment, assess the growing risks faced by those under the current military service legislation and how missing-person advertisements function as a quantitative proxy for tracking the civilian impact of conscription policies.

2 BACKGROUND: PEOPLE'S MILITARY SERVICE LAW

The People's Military Service Law, announced by the SAC, was implemented on 10 February 2024. Originally [drafted](#) by General Ne Win's administration in [1959](#), it was subsequently amended by Senior General Than Shwe in November 2010. [The law](#)

[delineates](#) the eligibility criteria for military service based on age, gender and profession:

- Men aged 18 to 35 years
- Male Professionals aged 18 to 45 years
- Women aged 18 to 27 years
- Female Professionals aged 18 to 35 years

All Myanmar citizens in the specified age groups are required to complete at least two years of military service. Professionals may serve for up to three years. However, the law explicitly outlines exemptions for specific groups, including members of religious orders, married women, and individuals deemed permanently disabled or medically unfit for service. Additionally, temporary deferments are granted to students, civil servants, and sole caregivers.

While the law includes provisions for women, its enforcement focus is overwhelmingly directed toward men of military age.

3 TRENDS IN MISSING PERSONS

3.1 LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS (JANUARY 2021-2025)

Myanmar Witness collected data from Facebook using the keywords “လူပျောက်” (missing person) and “လူပျောက်ကြော်ငြာ” (missing person advertisement). A total of 477 missing-person advertisements were compiled and analysed. A focused sample of January each year provides a clear illustration of change over time (figure 1).

Month and year	Total missing person cases	Total of male missing person cases	Total of female missing person cases
January 2021	4 cases	2	2
January 2022	26 cases	14	12
January 2023	17 cases	5	12
January 2024	41 cases	25	16
January 2025	82 cases	49	35

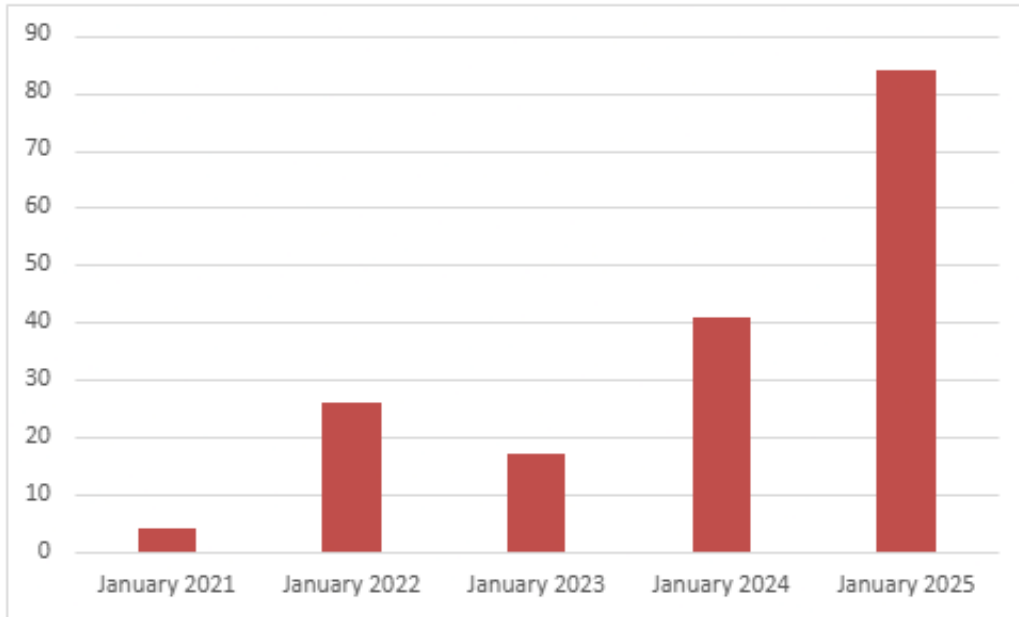


Figure 1: January-Specific missing persons statistics from 2021 to 2025

This trajectory shows a notable increase in missing persons, with the most significant occurring after the February 2024 implementation of the law.

3.2 MISSING PERSONS IN 2024 - REGIONAL

In addition to collecting missing persons advertisements for January each year, Myanmar Witness also identified and analysed advertisements published throughout 2024. This broader dataset provides further detail on the geographic distribution and characteristics of reported cases during the first year of the conscription law's implementation.

According to Myanmar Witness's collection, the number of reported missing persons increased following the enactment of the military service law. In December 2024, Facebook recorded the highest number of posts mentioning missing people, totalling 47 reports for that month.

Geographically, the highest concentration of missing persons cases was identified in the following (figure 2):

- Yangon Region (163 cases).
- Mandalay Region (32 cases)
- Shan State (25 cases)

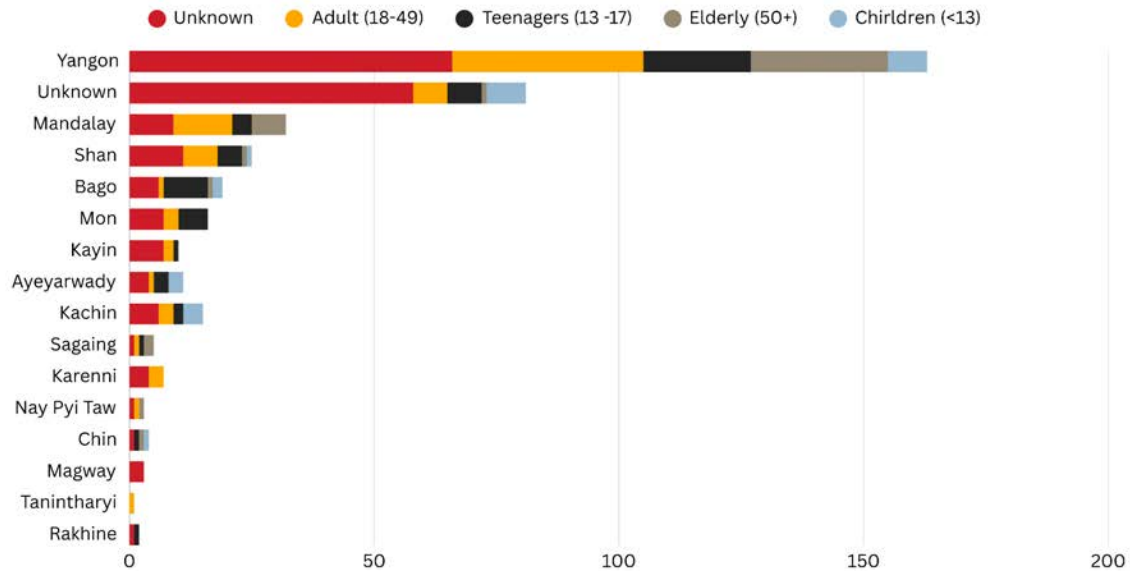


Figure 2: Number of reported missing persons from each State and Region.

However, it is important to note that several cases lacked precise location data; this is a limitation Myanmar Witness observed when collecting social media reports.

4 GENDERED ANALYSIS

Myanmar Witness examined the impact of the People's Military Service Law on gender in the 2024 missing-person collection, as this period covers the first year of the law's implementation. As the conscription law has different requirements based on gender and age, a gender-disaggregated analysis of reported cases helps assess how the law may be affecting men and women differently. In 2024, missing persons advertisements published on Facebook (figure 3) showed:

- 233 males were reported missing
- 149 females were reported missing
- Five cases did not mention a specific gender.

Additionally, the advertisements included children under the age of 13, teenagers aged 13 to 17, and adults over the age of 50 (figure 4). Of those listed as missing, 78 individuals have reportedly been located, and five were declared deceased (figure 4).

This disparity illustrates the structure of the conscription law and how it explicitly targets men of military age, as men and boys constitute the dominant proportion of missing persons reported. In this context, the gendered dimension of the law is structural rather than incidental, and the increase in disappearances reflects this directly.

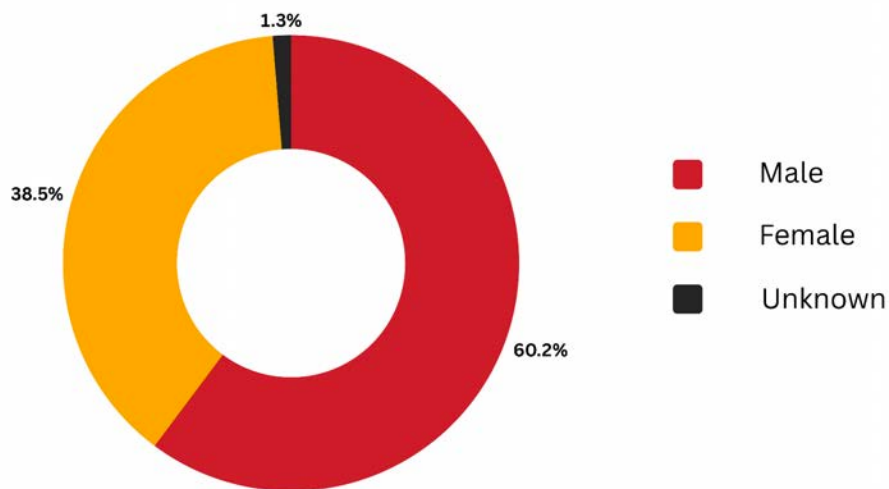


Figure 3: Chart illustrating the number of missing men and women reported in social media missing persons advertisements as of 2024.

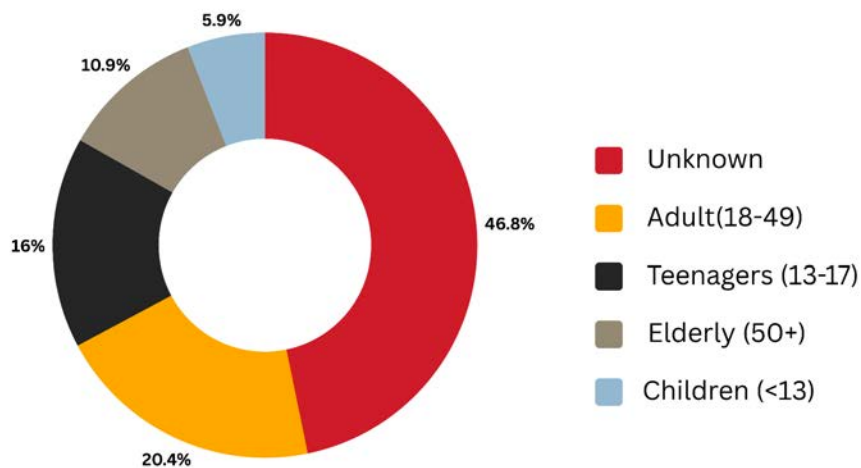


Figure 4: Chart illustrating the number of reported missing adults, teenagers, and children under 13, based on social media alerts through 2024.

5 ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS

A combination of administrative control, forms of coercion, and the targeted identification of eligible men was identified alongside the implementation of the conscription law.

The following are several key enforcement mechanisms identified:

Mass arrests and forced conscription:

According to the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR)'s [Unlawful Conscription Watch Dashboard](#), as of January 2025, over 26,000 arrests and 1,514 reported cases of forced conscription have been documented. Although both men and women are to be conscripted, it is men who seem to be actually getting arrested and forcibly conscripted in much higher numbers. This reflects the gendered targeting embedded in the law.

Quota-driven recruitment:

Following the SAC's announcement to [recruit approximately 5,000 personnel](#), at least 9,000 individuals were conscripted in the first [two phases](#). This suggests an expansion beyond the initial reported projections.

Localised identification systems:

Reports indicate that authorities carried out census-style data collection, including age verification, household registration checks, and the recording of personal details of men of military age. According to [Myanmar Now](#), within one month of the enactment of the law, military council-affiliated groups in several townships under their control in Yangon conducted a census of eligible men. A local youth told [Myanmar Now](#) during the census:

"They came with the exact name of the individual of military age, recorded their phone number and name, and informed me that I am not allowed to travel outside mentioned that they would return at the end of April, but did not specify an exact date."

Coercive and adaptive recruitment practices:

Later recruitment phases, [Batches 3, 4, and 5](#), show an increasing reliance on different methods, such as financial inducements, coercive recruitment, and abductions.

Geographic concentration:

Recruitment activity appears to have been concentrated in SAC-controlled areas, including Mandalay, Rakhine, Bago, Magway, Yangon, and Sagaing, as documented by the [Burma Affairs and Conflicts Study \(BACS\)](#).

Mobility restrictions and containment:

In response to avoidance strategies, including Burmese citizens seeking employment abroad, in January 2025, the SAC suspended the bilateral employment agreement (MoU) between countries and the issuance of permits for eligible individuals to work abroad, according to [Radio Free Asia](#) (RFA). This limits exit options for eligible individuals.

Arrest patterns at local level:

One example of this, reported by the [Yangon Scout Network \(RSN\)](#), is that in January 2025, 147 arrests were carried out in Yangon. A documented variation in outcomes was also noted, including detention, release and those who reportedly escaped.

These mechanisms show that conscription has not simply been implemented through formal legal avenues, but also through a broader system of strict surveillance, restriction and coercion. This context is vital when it comes to interpreting missing person data, as individuals who have been reported missing may, in several cases, have been taken into these different enforcement processes without formally notifying family members.

6 CROSS-BORDER DYNAMICS & REPATRIATION

The detention and deportation of undocumented Burmese citizens from neighbouring countries suggests a direct facilitation of the enforcement of the military council's military service law and martial law.

Based on available data collected between February 2024 and May 2025, over 3,313 Burmese citizens were returned from countries including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Thailand (figure 5).

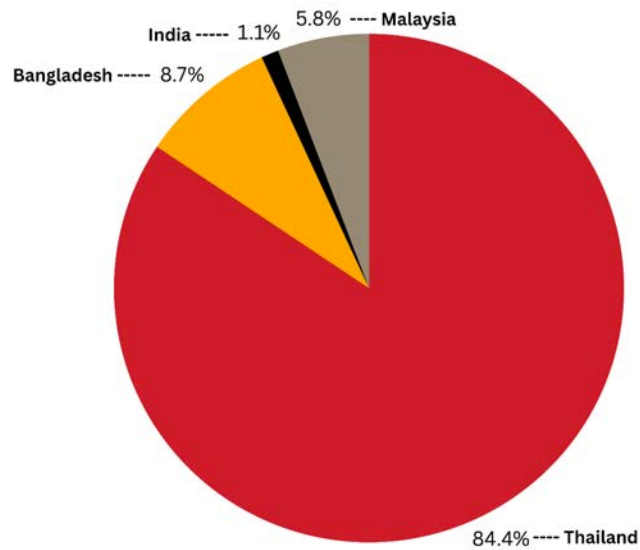


Figure 5: Proportion of Myanmar citizens repatriated to military authorities by neighbouring nations

6.1 NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Thailand:

Myanmar Witness believes the Thai government has been the primary recipient of undocumented Burmese nationals transferred to the Myanmar military authorities. According to [RFA](#), over 2,500 of the 3,313 documented returns between February 2024 and May 2025 were repatriated to Myanmar (figure 7).



Figure 6: Thai authorities reportedly coordinating efforts to repatriate Myanmar nationals at the Immigration Office in Ranong. (Sources: [ตรวจคนเข้าเมืองจังหวัดระนอง ดม.จ.ระนอง](#), Immigration Office in Ranong via Facebook)



Figure 7: On 24 February 2025, over two hundred Burmese workers reportedly detained in Thailand were repatriated via Ranong Port by Thai authorities. (Source: [RFA Burmese](#))

India:

Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh stated that biometric data has been collected from over 5,000 Myanmar nationals, according to [Myanmar Now](#) (figure 8). Subsequently, efforts are underway to facilitate their repatriation. Additionally, [Voice of Myanmar](#) stated that on 12 June 2024, 38 Burmese citizens detained in Imphal, Manipur, were transferred from Indian authorities to the SAC via the Moreh-Tamu border crossing on 11 June 2024. This transfer reflects the strong cooperation and relations between the military council and the Indian authorities.

According to [RFA Burmese](#) (26 December 2024), the Indian government has announced a revision of its movement policies for indigenous populations along the India-Myanmar border. The policy now requires individuals to obtain a passport visa for entry into India, replacing the previous visa-free travel allowance of up to 16 kilometres. Additionally, the Indian government has implemented restrictions on

foreign visitors entering the states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland, mandating prior visa applications. These measures are expected to further complicate mobility and may impact efforts to evade military service or support the implementation of military service laws in the region.



Figure 8: In May 2024, the Indian government facilitated the transfer of certain Myanmar nationals to the military authorities via the border crossing. (Source: [Voice of Myanmar](#) via Facebook)

Malaysia:

Malaysian authorities reportedly repatriated over 200 Burmese nationals in February 2025. Reports, including [Myanmar Labour News](#), indicate that more than 1,000 Burmese nationals were detained in January and February 2025, with further repatriation efforts possible (figure 9). These actions by Malaysian authorities appear to be influenced by support for the military council's military service regulations.



Figure 9: Myanmar nationals apprehended in Malaysia (Source: [Myanmar Labour News](#) via Facebook)

Bangladesh:

The Bangladesh government and the military council have embarked on a third initiative to facilitate the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, according to a [BBC article](#) published on 12 July 2023 (figure 10). This not only highlights broader regional coordination, but also that while not all returns may be directly linked to conscription, they do contribute to an environment in which returnees could be exposed to recruitment.



Figure 10: Myanmar government officials demonstrate the conditions of new reception centres to Rohingya refugees on the Myanmar side, May 2023. (Source: [BBC Burmese](#))

These examples illustrate how individuals returning to Myanmar are not purely administrative, but also intersect with a system in which individuals, especially men of military age, are at further risk of being taken into a conscription process upon arrival in Myanmar.

6.2 CASE STUDIES

Evidence from case studies suggests that repatriation has contributed to the conscription process, with some individuals reportedly not returning home but instead being transferred directly to military-controlled sites. Many of these individuals are reportedly deployed to the frontline immediately after completing their training. Furthermore, some individuals have reportedly joined revolutionary groups and surrendered weapons, and there have been instances of defection, as reports indicate.

6.2.1 CASE STUDY: DEPORTATION TO TRAINING PIPELINE

Two individuals reportedly [detained](#) in Thailand were deported via Rangong, with around 120 others. Although they believed they would return home, they were instead transferred to Battalion 262 in Kawthaung and subsequently to Training School No. 12 in Palauk town, Tanintharyi Division, where they underwent military training.

Following their training, both individuals reportedly served in the 559th Infantry Battalion in Bok Sing Township. Instead of being stationed at the battalion premises, they were deployed to the front lines in Ye Ta Khun Village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. The [Dawna Column Facebook page](#) indicates active operations in Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, and Ye Townships. It is therefore plausible that Ko San Htun Aung and Ko Aung Myo Kyaw were released from the Dawna Column. [Photographs on social media](#) depict the Dawna Column handling weapons, including one MA-1 Mk. II and one MA-3 Mk. II, both manufactured by Myanmar Army defence factories (figures 11 and 12). Cross-referenced evidence supports the conclusion that they have deserted from active service in the Myanmar military.



Figure 11: The rifle provided by Ko San Htun Aung was transferred to the Dawna Column and identified as a Directorate of Defence Industries (DDI) made MA-3 Mk. II. (Source: [Dawna Column - P29902](#))



Figure 12: The rifle provided by Ko Aung Myo Kyaw was transferred to the Dawna Column and identified as a Directorate of Defence Industries (DDI) made MA-1 Mk. II (Source: [Dawna Column - P29902](#))

6.2.2 CASE STUDY: FROM THAILAND TO MILITARY SERVICE

According to [Dawei Watch](#), 270 young men were reportedly forcibly conscripted for military service, and 27 of them reportedly attacked two guards and subsequently escaped after being taken to Military Council Training School No. 12 in Palaw Township, Tanintharyi Region. [The Irrawaddy](#) states that some of these individuals were repatriated from Thailand. Dawei Watch also confirmed that the 27 individuals involved in the escape were repatriated from Thailand.

The Irrawaddy interviewed three individuals who reported being deported from Ranong, Thailand, to Kawthaung, Myanmar, in August 2024. Additionally, the [Ranong District Immigration Department's official Facebook page](#) posted statements regarding the repatriation of Myanmar nationals during the same period.

Three individuals, including Ko Thant Zin, provided testimony regarding their experiences. Ko Thant Zin stated that he personally observed a military council officer visit the immigration office in Ranong and preliminarily select men, including himself, for military service before their deployment to Kawthaung in August 2024. Following deportation, reportedly, he was forcibly inducted into the military and detained at the 262nd Infantry Regiment in Kawthaung. Similarly, Ko Soe reported that his family attempted to secure his release by paying the officers, but their efforts were unsuccessful. He also noted that some individuals managed to escape for various reasons.

Approximately 60 individuals, including the three aforementioned persons, were transported through Kawthaung to a military camp in Myeik. From there, they were transferred via warship to the 12th Training School in Ploenchit. Subsequently, they

were transferred from a navy vessel to fishing boats, where, during a reported attempted escape involving two guards, a group of about 30 recruits attempted to flee. During this incident, one individual reportedly died, and two others went missing, leaving 27 survivors. The group sought refuge with the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNU-KNDO) and surrendered two firearms. The KNU's Myeik-Dawei District Secretary confirmed the incident to [Karen Information Centre](#) and indicated that the refugees were subsequently repatriated. An examination of the surrendered weapons identified them as MA-1 Mk. II and MA-4 Mk. I models, both produced by the DDI.

These incident types show that repatriations from Thailand may be supporting the Myanmar military's recruitment efforts. The account of the escapee, who reported that a military council official visited the Ranong immigration station to pre-select for military service, supports this interpretation.



Figure 13: In early September 2024, The Irrawaddy reported that in Pulaw Township, two firearms discharged by two individuals who had fled from a vessel were surrendered to the KNDO authorities.

(Source: [The Irrawaddy](#))

7 CONCLUSION

Since the military council assumed power in Myanmar in 2021, there have been numerous reports of individuals going missing. Following the enactment of the military service law, which took effect in 2024, reports of missing persons have increased, particularly in areas still under the control of the military council. Additionally, there have been incidents of individuals being detained and disappeared while reportedly engaged in activities to support their families or while socialising with friends.

In response to the military service law targeting young people, many Myanmar youth have sought to study abroad in neighbouring countries, find employment abroad, or pursue other opportunities to avoid conscription. Some have reportedly successfully escaped to neighbouring countries; however, due to illegal crossings and other circumstances, they are often detained by authorities in those countries and subsequently transferred back to Myanmar, where they are forcibly sent to military training schools or deployed to the front lines.

This law has implications not only within Myanmar but also for Burmese youth abroad and their families. Numerous social media reports highlight concerns about the physical and psychological well-being of affected individuals, reflecting ongoing challenges faced by the community.

8 ABBREVIATIONS

Ministry of Human Rights	MoHR
Radio Free Asia	RFA
User-Generated Content	UGC
State Administration Council	SAC
State Security and Peace Commission	SSPC

