

Issue Brief

Charting the Future of a New Generation of Arakanese Youth Against a Backdrop of Military, Political, and Socioeconomic Crises

No (10/2026)

Youth Issues



Young people attending a training and discussion session at a location in Arakan. (Photo: DVB Burmese)

September 8, 2026

1. Introduction

(a) Main Focus	Opportunities, challenges, and crisis conditions faced by the youth in Arakan/Rakhine State amidst armed conflict
(b) Geographic Scope	Across Arakan
(C) Study Period	From January 2024 to August 2026

Background and Context

Since the resumption of armed conflicts between the Arakan Army (AA) and the junta forces in Rakhine State, youth have borne the brunt of severe challenges and hardships. In particular, as the military junta suffered increasing losses of military personnel during the ongoing conflict, it enforced the Military Service Law and launched a campaign specifically targeting young people through utilising arbitrary arrests, forced abductions, and detentions carried out under the pretext of guest registration inspections.

Simultaneously, the junta has exploited widespread youth unemployment by offering incentives to encourage military enlistment, while aggressively restricting young people from leaving the country. Rakhine youths fleeing to Yangon and other regions face multifaceted hardships. Fearing arbitrary arrest and detention many hesitate to visit government offices even for essential needs, such as renewing their National Registration Cards (NRCs).

Women face particularly severe circumstances, suffering devastating impacts on their employment, education, and general livelihoods. The fate of women, who travel abroad in search of employment, is also concerning. Some women have become the victims of human trafficking, while others have faced more severe forms of exploitation, including being sold. Due to these compounding hardships and challenges, the majority of youths have relocated to ULA-controlled areas. However, their struggles persist under new constraints—primarily due to the persistent lack of employment and the strict enforcement of the Arakan Army’s National Defence Emergency Provision (NDEP), which prohibits youth from travelling outside ULA-controlled territory.

As the Center for Arakan Studies (CAS) has previously published dedicated research papers addressing [youth education](#) and the restrictions and challenges faced by [young women](#), this study will focus primarily on other critical sectors rather than emphasising those two areas. This study is primarily based on reports from local media outlets, statements issued by international organisations, including the United Nations, and relevant administrative bodies, as well as interviews conducted by our Center for Arakan Studies (CAS), highlighting the challenges and hardships faced by youth in Rakhine State.

2. Summary of Findings

February 2024

(1) Muslim Youth from Kyaukphyu IDP Camp Forced into People Militia Training (Myanmar Now)

In February 2024, approximately [120 men](#) from the Kyauk Ta Lone Muslim IDP camp, which houses over 1,000 displaced people located about 3 miles south of Kyaukphyu downtown, were forced into a two-week “People's Militia Training” program of the Myanmar Military at the Kyaukphyu-based Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 542.

May 2024

(2) Recruitment and Conscription Conducted for People's Militia Training in Sittwe IDP Camps (Myanmar Now)

On May 25, the military junta initiated a lottery system to select youth from Rohingya IDP camps in Sittwe Township for mandatory military training. According to local residents, this marks a continuation of forcible conscription efforts previously carried out across Rohingya IDP camps and villages throughout January, February, and March, as the junta prepares to launch [another wave of recruitment](#).

August 2024

(3) What Rakhine Youths Say on International Youth Day (Narinjara)

August 12 marks International Youth Day. The United Nations designated August 12 as International Youth Day in the year 2000, and it has been annually celebrated since then.

[Ma Hla Hla Thein](#), a third-year mathematics student, shared her experience: *"When fighting erupted, attending classes became unsafe. Authorities inspected everyone regardless of gender, leaving no one feeling safe enough to travel alone. Even when trying to attend accounting or computer classes, we faced continuous interrogation: 'Where are you going? What for? Will you return or not, etc?' They check everything, even our identity cards, making in-person study nearly impossible. I attempted to switch to online learning from home, but they subsequently cut off internet access. As living conditions in Sittwe became increasingly unbearable, I fled to liberated territory. Under current conditions, employment opportunities have completely dried up, no one is even posting job advertisements."*

December 2024

(4) Rakhine Youth Face Barriers in Pursuing Higher Education Abroad Due to Identity Card Delays (Development Media Group)

Rakhine youth in Yangon are encountering severe difficulties travelling abroad for higher education due to challenges in renewing or replacing their [Citizenship Scrutiny Cards](#) (CSC). Although routine administrative procedures—such as updating CSC upon reaching 18 years of age or re-applying for lost cards—fall under the jurisdiction of local Department of Immigration and Population offices, youth face acute risks when approaching these facilities due to a complete lack of safety and security guarantees.

February 2025

(5) Military and ALP arrest four youths in Sittwe (Development Media Group)

On the morning of February 9, over ten members of the military junta and Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) forces raided Min Gan Ward No. 12 and 14, arresting 20-year-olds Maung Zaw Naing Oo, Maung Ni Tu Che, Maung Pu Che, and Maung San Ko Oo from their homes. *"I heard that two people were taken from each ward. All of those arrested were young people. More than ten armed personnel came and picked them up by vehicle. We don't know why they were arrested,"* said [a Sittwe resident](#). After the resumption of the clashes between the Arakan Army and the junta forces in November 2023, the ALP and the junta forces jointly arrested and extorted the civilians in Sittwe, and collected illegal tolls from the travellers and traders.

April 2025

(6) AA Recruits Trainees for Public Health Courses (Western News)

Starting on 25th April, the Public Health Department announced recruitment of trainees for [public health training](#) programs. According to a statement issued by the Arakha Public Health Department, applications are open for the self-funded, 8-month Public Health Supervisor (2) course.

May 2025

(7) AA Enforces Travel Ban on Military-Eligible Youth in Rakhine State (Myanmar Now)

On May 22, the Arakan Army (AA) announced that youth eligible for military service under its [National Defence Emergency Provision \(NDEP\)](#) are strictly prohibited from traveling outside Rakhine State.

The AA stated that following the enactment of the NDEP on March 18, 2025, certain youth,

lacking a clear understanding of the emergency provision, were observed attempting to escape their national service duties through various means.

July 2025

(8) AA Sends Twenty Youths Travelling Outside Rakhine State to Military Training (Narinjara)

The Arakan Army (AA) detained [twenty youths](#) aged 20 to 30 from Ramree Township who were attempting to leave Rakhine State for Yangon and abroad, and subsequently transferred them to the military training camp, according to DMG. The twenty young people from Tha Lu Pyin and Thin Pan Kyaing villages in Ramree Township were arrested on June 10 at a checkpoint in Ann Township while attempting to travel to Yangon and Malaysia in search of job opportunities.

August 2025

(9) Two trafficked Rakhine Women Sold as Chinese Brides Seek Urgent Help (Development Media Group)

Two Rakhine women who fell victim to the [human trafficking network](#) and were sold into forced marriages in China urgently require help for their rescue, according to statements from the victims and local support actors assisting them.

(10) Junta-Controlled Newspapers Reject Missing Youth Notices (Development Media Group)

State-controlled newspapers—including The Kyemon and Myanmar Alinn, are reportedly refusing requests from families seeking to publish notices for missing young relatives.

“Everyone knows that the junta is forcibly detaining people for mandatory people’s militia service. The junta wants to [avoid answering](#) for these actions internationally. That is why they are banning missing persons notices that contradict or expose their official narrative,” said a local Rakhine youth.

October 2025

(11) Rakhine Women Suffer Loss of Employment and Educational Opportunities (Development Media Group)

According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, women in conflict-affected Rakhine State have suffered disproportionate losses in employment, educational access, and participation in vocational training programs compared to men. The report highlights that Rakhine State recorded the [second-highest level](#) of these disruptions, standing at 32 per cent.

January 2026

(12) The Future of Youth in ULA-controlled area (Development Media Group)

As the armed conflict continues, the local population faces the severe impact of economic decline, suspended educational opportunities, and a scarcity of jobs in Rakhine State.

In areas currently controlled by the Arakan Army, [youth unemployment](#) continues to rise. Forced to take up whatever odd jobs are available to meet their basic survival needs, many express that their future aspirations are slipping away.

April 2026

(13) Public Criticism arose over AA's Detention of Traders and Youth (Development Media Group)

Public criticism is rising regarding the recent increased detentions of Rakhine traders and youths by the Arakan Army (AA) at checkpoints in Paletwa Township, allegedly for attempting to leave Rakhine State.

According to local sources, individuals were previously permitted to [travel beyond Rakhine State](#) upon presenting four official recommendation letters from relevant administrative authorities; currently, however, even those carrying valid travel permits are being detained and forcibly routed into military training camps.

May 2026

(14) Junta Forces Arrest Over 30 Sittwe Residents Under the Pretext of Guest Registration Inspection (Myanmar Peace Monitor)

Military junta forces have been conducting raids under the pretext of [guest registration inspections](#) across villages, displacement camps, and monasteries housing displaced civilians in Sittwe.

"In areas or households with many young men, the military comes to inspect up to twice a day," said a local youth from Sittwe. "If guest registration hasn't been reported, they arrest people and extort money. In some cases, individuals are detained inside their own homes and only released after paying a bribe. I have personally been detained nearly three times."

(15) Rising Disappearances Reported Among Rakhine Youths Displaced to Yangon (DVB Burmese Edition)

The Rakhine National Network reports a growing number of disappearances this year among young Rakhine individuals who fled or relocated from Rakhine State to Yangon.

According to [Ko Kyaw Soe Naing](#), a representative from the network's legal team, the organization has received roughly eight requests for legal assistance so far in 2026 regarding missing internally displaced youth who had recently arrived in Yangon.

June 2026

(16) Military Junta pursues Kyaukphyu Youths to Join Military Intelligence (Development Media Group)

Military junta forces, which still maintain control over Kyaukphyu township in Rakhine State, are using incentives to recruit local youth into [military intelligence](#).

Recruiters are targeting young individuals aged 16 and above from urban wards and surrounding villages, with the minimum qualification of grade four completed, promising civil service status for the joiners.

(17) Unlawful Conscription Watch (UCW) reports that nearly 4,000 were recruited for Conscription in Rakhine between 2025 and 2026 (Narinjara)

A [report](#) released by Unlawful Conscription Watch (UCW) indicates that 3,993 individuals in Rakhine State were subjected to forced military service by the military junta in 12 months between May 2025 and May 31, 2026. This figure represents the second-highest number of forced conscripts recorded among Myanmar's 15 states and regions, including the Naypyidaw Union Territory.

(18) Armed Conflict Severely Impacts Employment and Education for Rakhine Youth (DVB Burmese Edition)

According to a recent report by the Youth Lead Organisation (YLO), ongoing military conflict in Rakhine State has severely undermined employment opportunities for local youth, with [an unemployment rate of 55% in the region](#). According to YLO's "Livelihood Need Assessment Report," released on June 22, youth across Rakhine State are facing severe crises driven by a scarcity of job opportunities, skill deficits, and a lack of capital to start businesses.

July 2026

(19) Arakan Army (AA) Sends Detained Youth in Thandwe Township to Military Training (DVB Burmese Edition)

The Arakan Army (AA) has transferred a group of young individuals, previously arrested for attempting to leave Rakhine State, to military training camps in Thandwe Township, according to sources close to the victims' families.

[A source close to the AA](#) stated that over 80 youth from various areas across Thandwe Township had been detained, and all of them were recently sent to military training in recent days.

Under current policy, travel outside Rakhine State is strictly prohibited for men aged 18 to 45 and women aged 18 to 25, with exceptions granted only for severe medical emergencies cleared by the Arakha People's Health Department.

(20) Muslim Men and Women Soldiers of the AA Actively Join Rakhine Flood Relief Rescue (Narinjara)

Muslim men and women soldiers serving in the Arakan Army (AA) are actively participating in flood relief and rescue operations across Rakhine State. On 15th July, [AA personnel](#) distributed essential food supplies, including rice, to flood-affected communities, including the Muslim villages of Than Chwee (Zay Tan), Tha Pyu Chaung, Sin Oh Pyin, Shwe Oh Pyin, and Day Lee in Buthidaung Township.

(21) Yangon Region Rakhine Ethnic Affairs Minister blame AA and urges the Rakhine youth to join the military (Narinjara)

U Nay Min Tun, the Yangon Region Rakhine Ethnic Affairs Minister and a parliamentary representative from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), reportedly blamed the Arakan Army (AA) during a meeting with Rakhine residents while lobbying local youth to join the military conscription.

“He told us that if administrators come to collect names for military service, we should join willingly, warning that we would face arrest if we refuse and also, we could be returned after the service”, said a local [Rakhine woman](#).

(22) Seven detained Students in Kyauktaw are involved in Drug Cases (Narinjara)

The seven students [detained](#) in Kyauktaw Town on 8th July, 2026, were involved in illicit drug cases, according to an official from the Kyauktaw Township Department of Law Enforcement and Public Security (DLEPS).

In June, authorities also detained 22 individuals, including three students, three armed members, and five women. Consequently, between 2nd June and 17th July, DLEPS apprehended a total of 77 drug dealers and users within 46 days in Kyauktaw Township.

August 2026

(23) Junta Forces Detain a Rakhine Youth in Sittwe (Narinjara)

A joint force of military and police reportedly detained [a local youth in Sittwe](#) while returning

home from work at night. He has since lost contact with his family and remains missing. The detained youth has been identified as 24-year-old Ko Than Aung Soe from Kathe Ward, Sittwe.

3. Findings

1. Since early 2024, the military junta has systematically subjected young people in Rakhine State to forced recruitment targeting displaced Muslim populations in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe under the guise of People's Militia training. Meanwhile, the Arakan Army (AA) enacted the NDEP, prohibiting eligible individuals from leaving the region, while detaining and sending youth who attempt to leave Rakhine State to military training. According to Unlawful Conscription Watch (UCW), the Myanmar military alone forcibly conscripted approximately 3,993 young individuals across Rakhine State between May 2025 and May 2026.

2. Everyday mobility for education, vocational training, and employment has become challenging due to pervasive security risks and invasive inspections. Furthermore, administrative hurdles in issuing and renewing Citizenship Scrutiny Cards indirectly restrict the youths from pursuing overseas study and job opportunities. According to an assessment of the Youth Lead Organisation (YLO), 55 per cent of youth in Rakhine State are currently unemployed, while a recent UNDP report ranks Rakhine State second nationwide for gendered disruptions to livelihoods and schooling.

3. In Sittwe, the joint force of the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and Myanmar Military is arresting youths from their houses under the pretext of guest list inspection and extorting money. The disappearances of Rakhine youths are still occurring, and the state-owned news outlet denies publishing the disappearance cases. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for the family to know their family member's whereabouts.

4. Under the National Defence Emergency Provision (NDEP), the United League of Arakan (ULA) has restricted military-eligible youths from travelling outside Rakhine State. It has also transferred at least 80 individuals intercepted during exit attempts directly to Arakan Army (AA) military training camps. However, the ULA also implemented Public health supervision training (2) for the Rakhine youth to improve public healthcare service. Additionally, Muslim AA personnel were deployed alongside regional ULA relief teams during recent flood rescue and disaster response operations.

5. Due to the ongoing conflict, economic decline, halted educational opportunities, and severe job shortages in Rakhine State are shattering the future aspirations of local youth. The recent case of two Rakhine women who fell victim to human trafficking and were sold as brides in China highlights the rising peril of human trafficking networks. Overall, young people in Rakhine State are trapped in a desperate situation with no way out, caught between forced recruitment by the junta and the recruitment of the military trainees by the AA, economic hardship, and mounting security threats.

4. Analysis

Since the 2021 military coup, a new generation of youth across Myanmar has seen its future disappear, forced to navigate an increasingly harsh and tumultuous era. Young people in the 21st century have become more mobile while their aspirations have also changed and grown, due to technology-driven flows of information. Although the military and political situation in Rakhine State had remained relatively stable for a period following the coup, the resurgence of fighting in November 2023 completely shattered that fragile stability.

Moreover, the People's Military Service Law enacted by the military junta in early 2024 poses a direct threat to Rakhine youth aged 18 to 35, both within Rakhine State and across the country. In towns like Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, the military council began forcibly recruiting Rohingya and Muslim youth into its ranks through coercion and financial incentives. As a consequence, generations of young people have become victims of the intensifying armed conflict. On the other hand, the Arakan Army (AA), which gained control over most townships in the state by late 2024, enacted the National Defence Emergency Provisions Act, prohibiting youth from leaving the country and forcibly enlisting local youth as recruits.

Under the situation of military coup, political instability, and economic decline, youths in Rakhine State are seeing their prospects for a bright future slip away. Armed clashes have forced the closure of universities and colleges, leaving their education severely disrupted. In AA-controlled areas, initial efforts to re-establish educational pathways have only begun in recent years, specifically around 2025 and 2026. In other words, an entire generation of Rakhine youth has been trapped in a vicious cycle, caught between armed conflict, a scarcity of job opportunities, stalled or interrupted education, and mounting family crises.

In conclusion, these crises carry consequences that could impact the future of an entire generation. Key government leaders and civil society organisations should consider the future of young generations through more comprehensive initiatives. Only by implementing forward-looking, proactive policies while confronting current challenges and obstacles can sustainable, long-term outcomes be achieved.



About Center for Arakan Studies

The Center for Arakan Studies is an independent, non-partisan research organization established in December 2021 by journalists, political analysts, researchers, and social workers. The Center aims to enhance understanding of Arakan affairs by publishing rigorous research on human rights conditions, political, economic, and social developments in Arakan, as well as issues related to Arakan within Myanmar and internationally. The Center produces policy briefs and monthly reports on topics related to Arakan, which are published through its website and various publications.

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