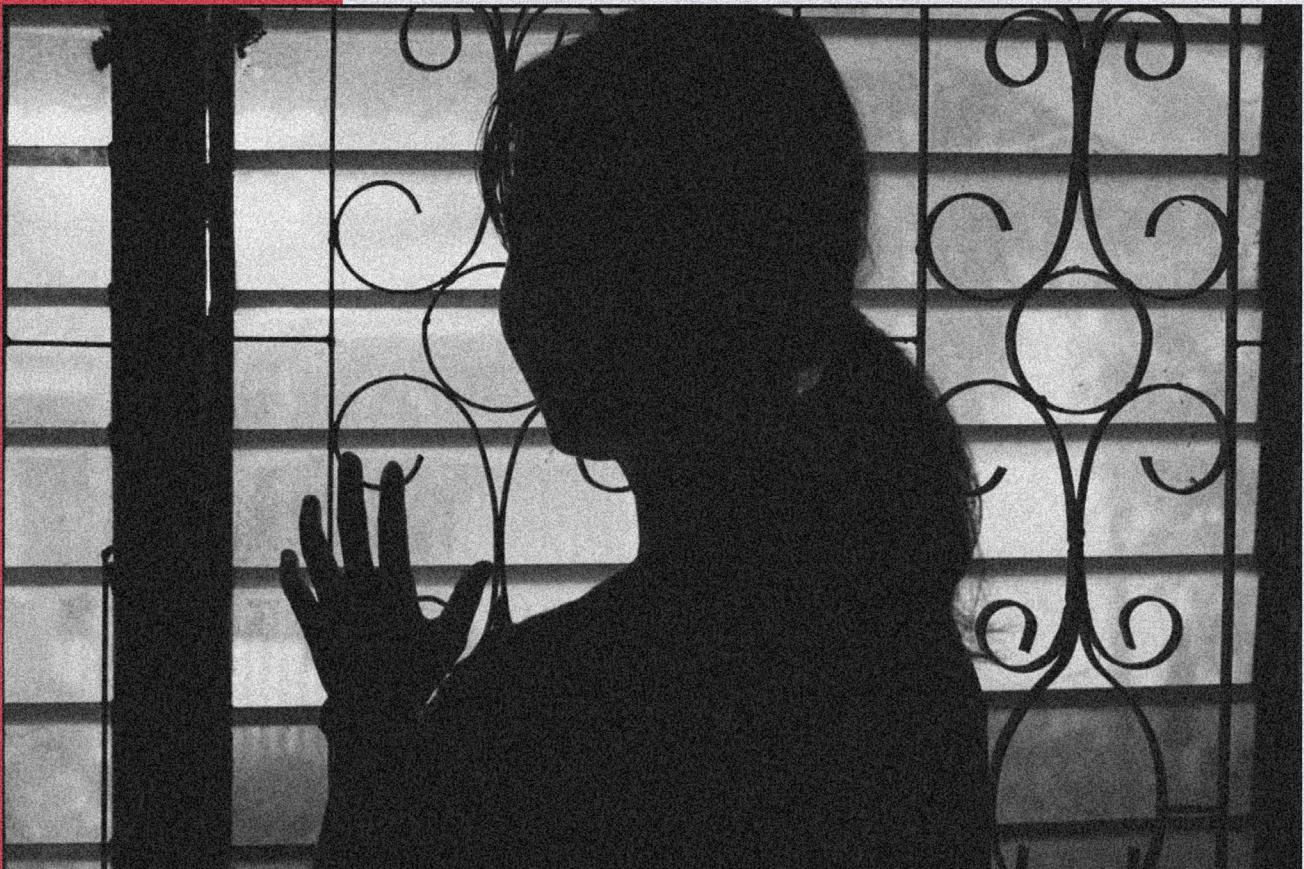


## **"THEY THOUGHT WE'D STAY SILENT":**

Survivors of Brutal Sexual Violence Fight  
Impunity in Post-Coup Myanmar



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**RESEARCH REPORT**

DECEMBER 2025

# Executive Summary

Beginning shortly after the country's independence in 1948, and for over 70 years, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and crimes have been a perverse and defining feature of the Myanmar military's offensive operations. The widespread and systematic use of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), particularly against ethnic minority communities, became a starkly evident pattern during the 2017 "clearance operations" against the Rohingya, where brutal acts of sexual violence entered the public conscious as a central component of the overall logic of violence.

Since the February 2021 coup d'état (coup), LAW finds that incidents of CRSV have increased countrywide, including in Sagaing, Magway, Chin, and Kayah/Karen State. Women, girls, men, and boys, as well as members of the LGBTQI+ community, are routinely subjected to a range of these violations.

The extensive and coordinated CRSV now documented in Sagaing and Magway represents a new and deeply troubling development. These regions, which before the coup had not experienced such patterns, are now sites of widespread violations. This shift reflects a geographic and strategic expansion of sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of repression and represents Myanmar's shifting conflict landscape.

Despite the significant prevalence of CRSV, several factors – including entrenched patriarchal stigma, the absence of adequate survivor support services, and near-total impunity – continue to obstruct access to accountability and redress for survivors.

This report analyses the scope, scale, and prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and crimes in Myanmar's post-coup context, situating current violations in these four regions – Sagaing, Magway, Chin State, and Kayah/Karen State<sup>1</sup> – within historic patterns across more than 70 years, while also highlighting emerging dynamics. Beyond the violence and crimes themselves, it examines obstacles to documenting sexual violence, particularly CRSV, as well as the impact of these challenges on justice and accountability for survivors across diverse gender and ethnic identities.

By mapping the violations and barriers, and identifying the support services required, the report lays a foundation for advancing survivor-centred justice initiatives and ending impunity for CRSV and SGBV in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup>





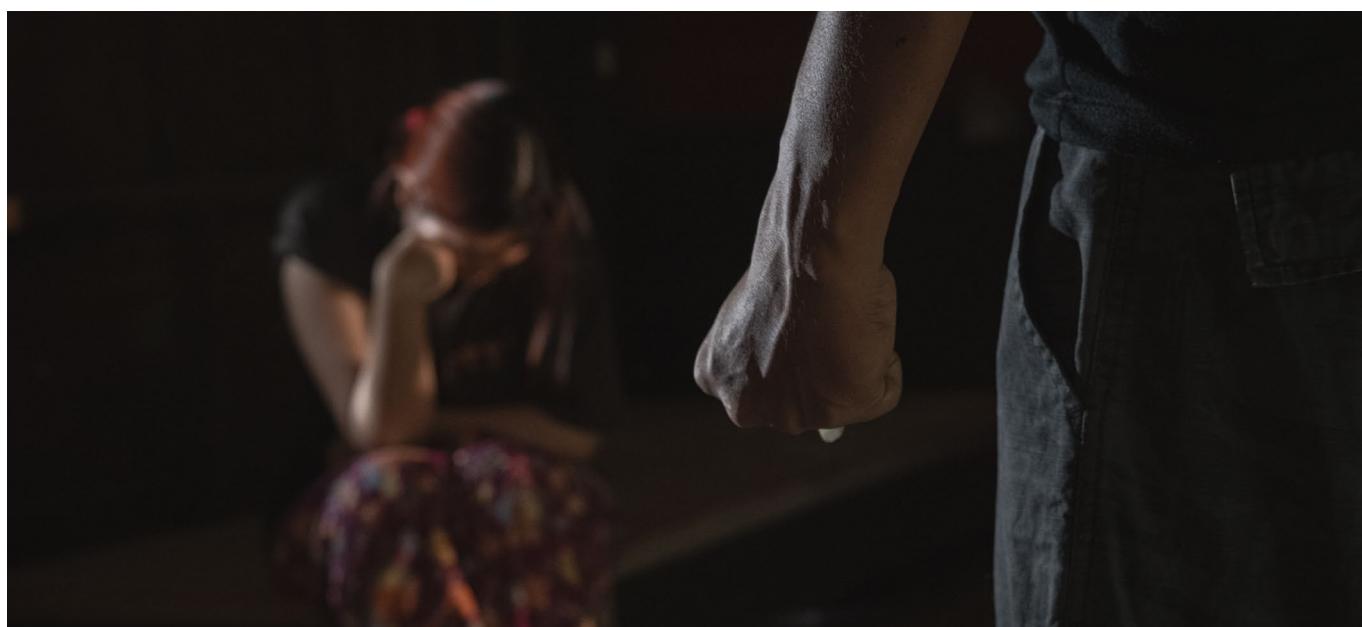
## Key Findings

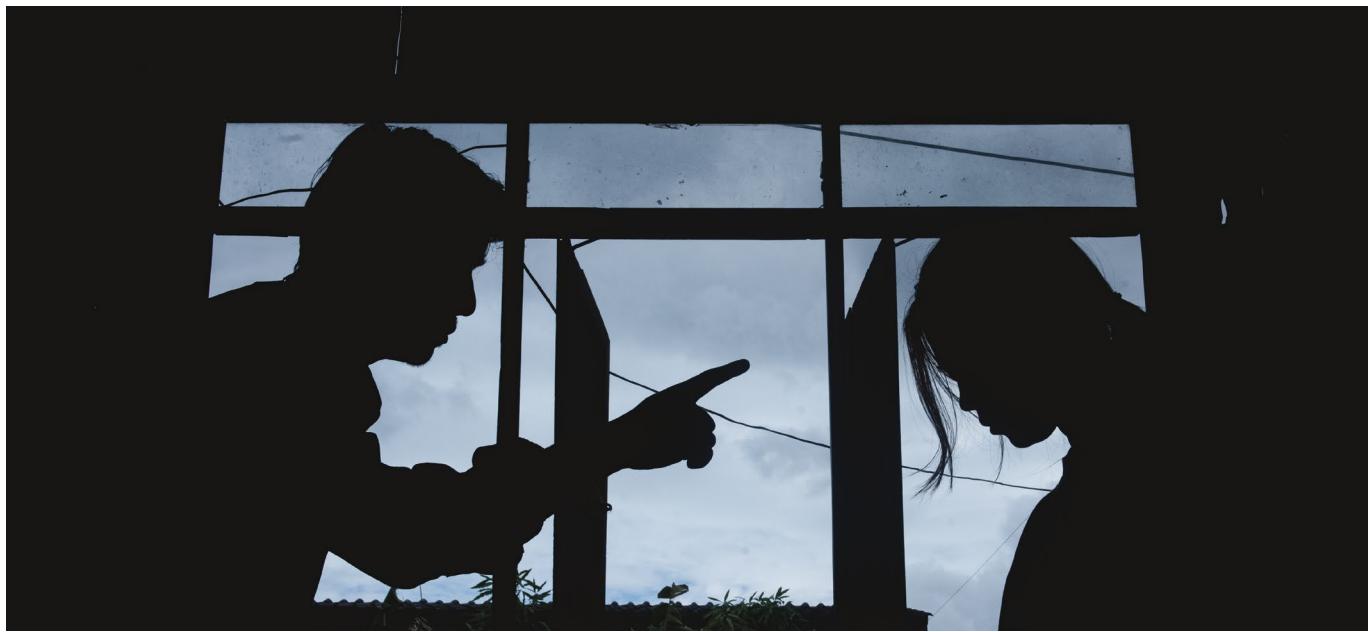
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- **Myanmar Security Forces, including Myanmar Armed Forces soldiers, military intelligence officers, and pro-military militias including the Pyusawhti, continue to commit CRSV consistent with entrenched patterns of historic military abuse. The so-called "Ogre Column," operating in Sagaing, has been particularly notorious for its brutality.**
- **Incidents committed by security forces typically fall into two distinct categories: (i) CRSV perpetrated by Myanmar military forces in the course of carrying out offensive military operations; and (ii) those perpetrated by police or intelligence forces during arrests, interrogation, and detention.**
- **Rape, frequently multiple-perpetrator or "gang" rape and often accompanied by extreme physical cruelty, has been deliberately employed as a weapon of war throughout the country, with particular prevalence in Sagaing, Magway, Chin, and Kayah/Karen States. Widespread and systematic attacks against civilians, including at checkpoints and during military operations, are marked by the routine use of sexual violence to extinguish communal resistance and collectively punish perceived opponents.**
- **Within interrogation facilities, including Shwe Pyi Tar, Ye Kyi Ai, Nine Mine (Yangon), Mandalay Royal Palace (Mandalay Region), and Mya Taung (Sagaing Region), sexual violence is deployed as a tool of humiliation and torture. CRSV is most prevalent during first instances of interrogation and occurs less frequently once individuals are transferred to prison. These acts constitute the crimes against humanity of sexual violence, torture, and persecution on both political and gendered grounds, as well as war crimes.**
- **No one is spared, as victimisation cuts across all groups. Victims include women (including pregnant women and women with disabilities), men, boys, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals. Victims' reported ages ranged from five to 70-years-old. These crimes occur in villages, cities, and interrogation sites across the country. Their nationwide spread and relentless repetition confirm that they are not isolated incidents but part of a deliberate, orchestrated campaign involving the multiple and repeated commission of crimes.**
- **Since the coup, elements of the armed resistance, including People's Defence Forces (PDF)<sup>3</sup>, Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs), and the Arakan Army (AA)<sup>4</sup>, have themselves committed CRSV. While some incidents appear opportunistic or individually motivated, others involved the targeting of Myanmar military or other (affiliated) factions. In some reported cases, resistance forces threatened victims with weaponised violence to participate in sexual acts. These violations have been reported in northern Shan, Rakhine, Kayah/Karen, Kachin, Chin, Sagaing, and Magway, where opposition offensives have intensified since 2024. Despite the absence of a systematic policy, such acts nonetheless reflected a persecutory intent and have contributed to the overall environment in which CRSV has become normalised across all sides of the conflict.**

- At the same time, domestic and intimate partner violence has also risen sharply, reflecting how sexual and gender-based violence now permeates every layer of Myanmar's protracted "polycrisis" of armed conflict, political breakdown, and economic collapse. These crimes further engage State obligations under international human rights law (IHRL) to prevent, investigate, and punish.
- Across the country, sexual and gender-based violence and crimes remain consistently under-reported. Survivors face stigma, reprisals, and a near-total absence of material and psychosocial support. Many remain trapped in silence: throughout its investigations, LAW and its partners faced grave security risks in gathering testimony, compounding the overall invisibility of these violations and obstructing pathways to justice, including universal jurisdiction.
- Despite these immense barriers, survivors persist in sharing the violations and harms they have suffered while demanding justice at extraordinary personal risk. That they continue to speak in the face of stigma, surveillance, and serious threats is both a testament to their resilience and an indictment of the international community's failure to protect them.
- In light of the consistent patterns documented since the February 2021 coup, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Myanmar Security Forces, including the Myanmar Armed Forces, military intelligence, police, and allied militias such as the Pyusawhti, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity since the February 2021 coup.
  - These include rape, sexual violence, and sexualised torture used systematically during military raids, at checkpoints, and in interrogation centres. These acts constitute the crimes against humanity of rape, torture, persecution on political and gender grounds, and other inhumane acts, and the war crimes of rape, torture, cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, and murder, all committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack on civilians.
- The report further finds that members of non-state armed groups, including the PDF, EROs, and the AA, have also perpetrated acts of rape, sexual violence, and sexual abuse linked to the conflict. Although these were largely opportunistic and not policy-driven, they nonetheless constitute war crimes under international law.

The foregoing findings must be situated within the historical context of the Myanmar military's systematic perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence and crimes and the entrenched impunity that has shielded perpetrators from accountability.





## Recommendations

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### 1. Prioritise Effective Methods to end Impunity and Hold Perpetrators Accountable

- **Initiate structural investigations within domestic jurisdictions**
  - Where possible, states should initiate structural investigations in their own domestic jurisdictions to prosecute gender-based crimes committed in the post-coup context under the principle of universal/extraterritorial jurisdiction.
  - Where and when necessary, states should amend or instate national legislation that allows for the prosecution of international crimes, including gender-based crimes.
- **Initiate new sanctions relevant to evidence of perpetrated gender-based crimes**
  - States should initiate sanctions against identified perpetrators and relevant actors responsible for gender-based crimes.
  - States should also continue to enforce sanctions against individuals and entities supporting the Myanmar military, which contribute to and enable perpetrators of gender-based crimes.
- **Support and advocate for progress regarding on-going international investigations and accountability processes**
  - Member States should initiate a resolution for the UN Security Council to immediately refer Myanmar to the ICC for investigation into violations of international law committed since the coup, including gender-based crimes, occurring within the territory of Myanmar.
  - States should enforce all arrest warrants issued for perpetrators of gender-based crimes (and other international crimes) committed in Myanmar, including against perpetrators residing in or traveling through their domestic territories.
  - States should support and advocate for the ICC Office of the Prosecutor to formally accept NUG's Article 12(3) declaration, which would allow the ICC to expand the current investigation to additional crimes committed within Myanmar, including since the 2021 coup.
- **Support reparative justice measures**
  - Member States must call for securing reparative measures for crimes committed against individuals across Myanmar, including supporting the **Myanmar Trust Fund Initiative**, to develop a trust fund for victims, particularly in light of the UN Human Rights Council's Resolution 59/2 (2025), which called upon Myanmar to ensure "reparations" for the victims and survivors of the past and on-going grave human rights violations and atrocity crimes committed at the hands of the Myanmar military.<sup>5</sup>

- **Support grassroots documentation efforts and emerging governance systems**
  - States and international donors should continue to support grassroots and civil society documentation efforts by funding sustainable, holistic approaches which recognise challenges and respond to identified needs. This would include support to addressing practical challenges, such as internet connectivity, and include capacity building for data collectors and on-the-ground documenters, such as trainings in forensic investigative techniques.
  - States and international donors should support emerging justice and governance systems in the development of gender justice outcomes, including increasing women's participation in federal democratic processes and governance systems. This would include prioritising support to increase gender sensitive applications in adjudicating or pursuing accountability for gender-based crimes in growing domestic systems outside of the national judicial system, particularly in areas with the highest levels of sexual violence.

## 2. Improve Protection Measures to Ensure Meaningful Survivor Engagement in International Justice Proceedings

- States should improve witness and victim protection practices within their own domestic systems to provide effective risk mitigation and support services to survivors who have been resettled or displaced. This includes effective witness protection services and available MHPSS referrals which are accessible to survivors. Those hosting displaced communities should provide needed support and protection services to prevent re-victimisation, including the adoption of decriminalisation policies regarding immigration and trafficking, where applicable and feasible.
- States must fast-track third-country resettlement processes for witness and survivors participating in international justice proceedings, or domestic proceedings under the principle of universal or extraterritorial jurisdiction.

## 3. Support and Provide Holistic Survivor-Centred Services

- Donors, humanitarian agencies, and service providers should prioritise and adequately fund specialised services for survivors which address the barriers to documentation and reporting gender-based crimes. This includes holistic material support – legal, MHPSS and medical support – and adopting survivor-centric approaches to justice initiatives.
- Donors should continue to provide support to the CRSV Alliance, including its member organisations and collective work, as it leads the way for future advocacy and initiatives to combat CRSV, end impunity, and hold perpetrators of gender-based crimes accountable in Myanmar.

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1. While research undertaken for this report predominantly concentrates on sexual and gender-based violence committed outside of Rakhine State, LAW and the research team acknowledges the serious perpetration of sexual violence committed in the 2017 "clearance operations" against the Rohingya community, as well as emerging reports of new waves of violence perpetrated by the Arakan Army, including instances of sexual violence, which have contributed to vast numbers of newly displaced Rohingya survivors. UNSC, 'Conflict-related sexual violence: Report of the Secretary-General' (15 July 2025) UN Doc S/2025/389 ¶ 47; UNHRC, 'Courage amid crisis: gendered impacts of the coup and the pursuit of gender equality in Myanmar, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar' (1 July 2024) UN Doc A/HRC/56/CRP.8 ¶ 1.
2. At every stage, the underlying research has built upon and reinforced the critical work of Myanmar civil society partners documenting and reporting these crimes, ensuring that their contributions are amplified and integrated.
3. In May 2021, the NUG announced the formation of the PDF to protect civilians from the military junta, as a precursor to a Federal Union Army. As of October 2022, it was estimated that the PDF was comprised of approximately 300 battalions of between 200 and 500 troops each. They are commanded by the Central Command and Coordination Committee along with the Joint Command and Coordination, established by the NUG along with various ethnic armed organizations (EAO) allies. Although the EAOs are often not aligned with the NUG, they work closely with the PDFs. In ethnic areas, PDFs are operationally commanded by or affiliated with the EAOS. They are formed, trained, and equipped as main combat forces by the NUG and its allied EAOS, and each unit is structured triangularly with squads, platoons, companies and three battalions each. Ye Myo Hein, 'Understanding the People's Defense Forces in Myanmar' (U.S. Institute for Peace, 3 November 2022) <<https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/understanding-peoples-defense-forces-myanmar>> accessed 7 October 2025.
4. Approximately 20 EROs, also known as EAOS, are involved in the conflict in Myanmar. EAOS operate for a variety of different purposes, including fighting to regain lost territory and protecting their ethnic kin from Myanmar military attacks. While the military capabilities and size of each EAO varies, six are generally considered to "have reasonable might": the AA, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Shan State Army-North, the Restoration Council of Shan State Army, and the United Wa State Army (UWSA). In 2021, the UWSA alone was estimated to possess 30,000 troops, artillery, and armed drones. The AA, another powerful EAO, has conducted significant military operations in civilian communities. Andrew Ong, '2021/79 "Ethnic Armed Organisations in Post-Coup Myanmar: New Conversations Needed"' (ISEAS, 11 June 2021) <<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-79-ethnic-armed-organisations-in-post-coup-myanmar-new-conversations-needed-by-andrew-ong/>> accessed 7 October 2025; UNHRC, 'Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar' (29 August 2025) UN Doc A/HRC/60/20 ¶ 35.
5. UNHRC Res 59/2 (17 July 2025) UN Doc A/HRC/RES/59/2. On 25 September 2024, at a high-level survivor-centred roundtable in New York during the UNGA, Deputy Minister Aung Kyaw Moe, Ambassador Beth Van Schaack, and Gambian Attorney General Dawda A. Jallow discussed how a UN trust fund could channel resources to victims across Myanmar. LAW's Antonia Mulvey urged swift UNGA action, and survivor Maung Sawyeddollah called for Rohingya voices to remain central to any new initiatives.



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