HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING

PAKISTAN

Human Rights Fact Sheet
Developments, Protection Concerns and Priority Recommendations

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Executive Summary

This update reviews reported human rights developments in Pakistan during October 2026, together with a few late-September items closely linked to the month's coverage. Key concerns include the continuing expulsion of Afghan medical students despite interim court orders; mob violence against a Christian community in Sheikhupura after a blasphemy accusation, the unresolved case of Maria Shahbaz and delays in reform of minority personal laws; the upholding and imposition of death sentences in blasphemy cases; a sharp rise in militant violence (CRSS recorded 1,415 deaths in the third quarter, up 83 per cent), together with planned relocations of civilians in Kalat and the blocking of 138,166 identity cards in Balochistan; abductions and unidentified bodies; the conviction on 29 October, after a trial held inside jail, of human rights lawyers Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha to an effective 10 years each under anti-terrorism law; severe prison overcrowding and the continued detention of prisoners unable to pay surety; a sustained pattern of gender-based violence and honour killings and continuing controversy around the Hina Javed case; the Peshawar school-roof collapse that killed 33, and 1.5 million children exposed to online sexual abuse; the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa emergency and governor's rule, the PTI long march and related detentions and mobile network suspensions; new surveillance and 'fake news' policing by the cybercrime agency; poverty, hunger and weak oversight of the right to information; and an EU message that GSP+ depends on implementation, not legislation.

Courts again sent mixed signals. The Peshawar High Court's stay of deportations, the Lahore High Court's inquiry into missing girls, the Supreme Court's rulings against ghag, swara and watta satta and on shiqaq, the denial of bail in child-rape cases and the launch of a Bench Book for GBV courts offered protection; the Federal Constitutional Court's refusal to suspend Bushra Bibi's sentence, a jail trial for the lawyer couple, the confirmation of a blasphemy death sentence and the expulsion of students despite court stays illustrated continuing accountability gaps. Priority action is needed to protect civilians and displaced persons, safeguard due process, protect minorities, women and children, restore constitutional government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, curb the misuse of blasphemy, cybercrime and counter-terrorism provisions, and strengthen independent oversight and effective remedies.

Each section below identifies the human rights standards most closely engaged – articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), international conventions and the Constitution of Pakistan – and sources are listed at the end of the document.

KEY INDICATORS REPORTED DURING THE PERIOD

INDICATOR	REPORTED FIGURE
Afghan students affected by PMDC directives (students' estimate)	~1,000 (incl. ~350 women); 86 PHC and 87 IHC petitioners; 20 expelled at QAMC Bahawalpur
Terrorism-related fatalities, Q3 2026 (CRSS)	1,415 (+83% on Q2); Balochistan 829, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 556
National identity cards blocked in Balochistan (Senate, 20 Oct)	138,166 (8,875 in Makran and Rakhshan)
Civilians ordered to relocate, Shor Parod, Kalat (deadline 30 Oct)	~30,000 people (5,000 families)
Lawyers Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha: sentence (29 Oct)	10 years each (concurrent terms)
Punjab prison population vs capacity, Sept 2026 (HRCP)	74,773 vs 39,204 (190.73%)
Under-trial prisoners, national share, 2024 (HRCP/NCHR)	73.41%
Prisoners in Punjab held despite bail for inability to pay surety	113 (incl. 11 children)
Missing girls in Punjab, per LHC hearing (7 Oct)	500+
Killed in Al-Khair school roof collapse, Peshawar, 15 Oct	33 (32 students aged 7–14 and a teacher)
Internet-using children (12–17) exposed to online sexual abuse in a year	~1.5 million (1 in 16)
Multidimensional poverty rate (UNDP MPI)	38.3% (South Asia: 19.3%)

Source: Dawn / Voicepk.net / CRSS / PICSS / HRCP / NCHR / UNICEF / UNDP / SBP / EU Delegation reporting, October 2026 issue. Figures are as reported by the cited sources and, where noted, are claims or estimates not independently verified.

1. Principal Human Rights Developments

A. AFGHAN NATIONALS: STUDENTS, EDUCATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION

The expulsion of Afghan medical and dental students, which was the lead concern in the September issue, continued through October despite interim court protection. The federal government's deadline for Afghan students and doctors in training to produce valid documents or leave Pakistan expired on 10 October, according to a letter issued by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) that cited instructions conveyed by the Prime Minister's Office. Students admitted on reserved seats asked for exemptions, saying that those enrolled under the Afghan quota and who passed the entry test should be allowed to finish their degrees. The students' own estimate is that about 1,000 Afghan students, including around 350 women, are affected, and about 800 of them were selected under the HEC's Allama Iqbal Scholarship programme; they say there are no facilities for them to continue their education in Afghanistan (these are the students' figures and have not been verified).

Court relief was partial and uneven. On 5 October the Peshawar High Court restrained the deportation of 86 Afghan medical students and allowed them to continue their studies pending its next hearing on 12 October. On 30 September the Islamabad High Court disposed of a petition by 87 Afghan students facing deportation over delayed visa renewals, declining to exercise writ jurisdiction on a policy matter but converting the petition into a representation and directing the Ministry of Interior to decide within 30 days; the applications had been pending on the Pak Visa Online System. Students' representatives said courts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab had issued stay orders but that the PMDC's response was awaited, and that the uncertainty and examination pressure were taking a mental toll.

Despite the Lahore High Court's suspension of the PMDC directives for the petitioners in September, **Quaid-i-Azam Medical College, Bahawalpur began expelling 20 Afghan residents and students on 16 October** (12 postgraduate residents and eight students). They were told to vacate hostels, clear dues, obtain no-objection certificates and leave at the earliest, and the college sent their passport details to the district police officer and other offices for arranging departure. A college source said the action followed the government's fresh instructions.

The wider context is a weakening international protection system. Dawn reported a UNHCR warning that nearly 8.3 million refugees and other forcibly displaced people risk losing assistance; UNHCR's funding fell from $5.2 billion in 2024 to $3.9 billion in 2025 against a need of $8.5 billion this year, of which 32 per cent had been received by the end of July. Pakistan still hosts more than 700,000 registered Afghan refugees.

ASSESSMENT

Education should not be used as an instrument of collective penalty, and court orders should be honoured by public institutions. Authorities should withdraw the PMDC directives, allow enrolled students to complete their degrees, decide pending visa applications promptly and transparently, carry out individual risk assessments before any return – with particular attention to women and girls – and publish the policy on which the directives rely.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 14 (right to seek asylum); Art. 26 (right to education); Arts. 2 and 7 (non-discrimination and equal protection).
International conventions and standards	Non-refoulement: CAT Art. 3 and ICCPR Art. 7 (Pakistan is a party to both); 1951 Refugee Convention Art. 33 (Pakistan is not a party, but the principle is widely regarded as customary law); ICCPR Art. 13 (safeguards on expulsion); ICESCR Art. 13 and CRC Arts. 22 and 28 (education; refugee children); CEDAW Art. 10 (women's equal access to education).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 4 (right to be treated in accordance with law, extended to every person within Pakistan); Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 10A (due process); Art. 25A (free education, ages 5–16).

Sources: [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

B. RELIGIOUS MINORITIES, FORCED CONVERSION AND PERSONAL-LAW REFORM

Mob violence. A mob set fire to the house and adjoining clinic of Kamran Masih (40), a Christian man, in Gharyal Kalan village, Narang Mandi, Sheikhupura, after he was arrested on 8 October under section 295-C PPC over an allegedly blasphemous video shared in WhatsApp groups; he had been moved to a safe house. More than 35 Christian families fled the village, and an eyewitness said the mob threatened to return after Friday prayers. Punjab police said they registered a separate FIR and arrested five alleged attackers. The incident was likened to the 2023 Jaranwala attacks. No deaths or injuries were reported. The allegation against Mr Masih has not been tested in court.

Forced conversion and child marriage. At a UN Human Rights Council side-event in Geneva on 2 October, the UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues and on violence against women, among others, criticised weak enforcement of child-protection laws and the lack of rescue for abducted minority girls. The Jubilee Campaign's *Stolen Girls* report, presented there, documents over 210 cases of abducted minor Christian girls with an average victim age of 12.8 years, with Punjab the main hotspot; the figures are the campaign's own. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues cautioned that new legislation alone would not resolve the problem and that blanket bans on forced conversion can be turned against minorities, urging police training and an end to institutional bias. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women noted Punjab's Child Marriage Restraint Act 2026 (minimum age 18) but cited inconsistent judicial application and police pressure on families to withdraw complaints. Pakistan authorities had not responded to earlier UN communications, panellists said. On 21 October the Federal Constitutional Court re-issued notices in the review petition concerning the nikah of Maria Shahbaz, a Christian girl abducted in 2020 at the age of 13, who is reported to remain with a man about 30 years old; the court asked counsel to identify the error in the original judgment.

Personal laws. At an AGHS Legal Aid Cell–EU roundtable in Islamabad on 30 October, speakers identified weak implementation, low awareness and administrative obstacles as the main problems for Hindu, Sikh and Christian personal laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance. They noted that the Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act applies only in Punjab although most Sikhs live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; that union-council staff in Sindh delay or refuse Hindu marriage registration; and that vague minimum-age provisions leave minor girls exposed to forced conversion and marriage. Sikh representatives also raised target killings and extremism in areas such as Peshawar and obstacles to maintaining historical gurdwaras and evacuee properties. In Layyah, Christians reported waiting 13 years for a boundary wall around the Falak Sher Christian cemetery and for burial land in Chak 262/TDA, where about 150 Christians have no cemetery.

ASSESSMENT

The State should protect persons accused of blasphemy and their communities from mob action, prosecute those who lead or incite mobs, and compensate families displaced from their homes. It should enforce the minimum marriage age in all conversion and marriage cases involving minors with independent age and consent verification, ensure that victims are placed in protective custody, and complete overdue reform of minority personal laws and registration systems through genuine consultation.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion); Art. 3 (life, liberty and security); Art. 7 (protection against discrimination and incitement); Art. 16(2) (marriage only with free and full consent); Art. 17 (right to own property).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 18 (religion), Art. 20(2) (incitement to religious hatred), Art. 23(3) (free and full consent to marriage), Art. 27 (minorities) and Art. 6 (life); CEDAW Art. 16(1)(b) and 16(2) and CRC Arts. 19, 24(3) and 35 (child marriage; abduction; protection from violence); 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief; 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 20 (profess, practise and propagate religion; manage religious institutions); Art. 36 (protection of minorities); Art. 25 (equality; Art. 25(3) special provision for women and children); Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 14 (dignity).

Sources: [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

C. MISUSE OF BLASPHEMY PROVISIONS

Blasphemy allegations again triggered mob violence in Sheikhupura (Section B). On 10 October the Supreme Court, announcing its final verdict in the Talagang blasphemy case, upheld the death sentence and fine imposed on Qaisar Ayub and acquitted his brother and co-accused Amoon Ayub, giving him the benefit of doubt and ordering his immediate release. The court held that private documents and blasphemous content found on electronic devices proved ownership in Qaisar Ayub's case, while the evidence against his brother was extremely weak. It also held that a 10-month delay in registering the FIR, caused by jurisdictional uncertainty between the police and the FIA, did not damage the prosecution. On 17 October a Lahore sessions court sentenced four men to death in a 2022 blasphemy case registered by the FIA cybercrime wing (see Section R).

The case of Amoon Ayub shows both the weakness of the evidentiary basis on which blasphemy prosecutions can proceed and the length of time accused persons spend in detention before a final appellate decision. Blasphemy cases in which the accused are Christians, Ahmadis or other minorities continue to carry risks that go beyond the courtroom, as Sheikhupura shows.

ASSESSMENT

Blasphemy appeals should be heard promptly and decided on admissible, independently verified evidence. Authorities should protect accused persons, their families, lawyers and judges from mob and political threats, review procedural safeguards to prevent misuse, and move toward ending the death penalty for offences that do not meet the 'most serious crimes' threshold of international law.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 10 (fair and public hearing); Art. 11(1) (presumption of innocence); Arts. 18–19 (belief and expression); Art. 3 (life, liberty and security of person).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 14 (fair trial), Art. 6(2) (death penalty only for the most serious crimes), Arts. 18–19 and Human Rights Committee General Comment 34 (blasphemy laws incompatible with the Covenant except as Art. 20(2) requires) and General Comment 36 (the death penalty may never be imposed for blasphemy); CAT Arts. 2 and 16.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 10A (fair trial); Arts. 4 and 9 (due process; security of person); Art. 14 (inviolability of dignity); Art. 20 (religious freedom); Art. 36 (protection of minorities).

Sources: [7] [12] [13]

D. CIVILIAN HARM, LAW AND ORDER AND DISPLACEMENT IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA AND BALOCHISTAN

Trends. The Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) recorded at least 385 violent incidents involving terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations in the third quarter of 2026, with 1,415 fatalities and 558 injuries – an 83 per cent rise on the second quarter (774 fatalities) and the highest intensity since 2021. Balochistan accounted for 829 deaths (up 213 per cent from 265) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for 556; together they accounted for 98 per cent of fatalities. More than 65 per cent of fatalities were militants killed in operations; civilian and security-personnel deaths together rose about 54 per cent. PICSS data cited by Dawn recorded 54 attacks in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in August (36 in July) and 89 in Balochistan (83 in July).

Operations and attacks. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) and state media reported numerous operations against what they term "Fitna al Khawarij" (the banned TTP) and "Fitna al Hindustan" (Baloch militant groups): eight killed in Dera Ismail Khan (3–4 October); five in Washuk (12–13 October); 12 militants killed on 11 October in Kurram when a group allegedly tried to cross from Afghanistan with fire support from Afghan Taliban posts, with one soldier killed; eight killed in Quetta, Nushki and Khuzdar (17 October); 10 killed, including a woman, in Gwadar after attacks on the city and the Gabd border crossing in which a civilian died (22–23 October); and six killed with two soldiers dead in Dera Ismail Khan (24–25 October). These figures are operational claims that could not be independently verified. Other reported incidents included an explosive device that killed two children (aged nine and ten) and injured three in Panjgur on 3 October; the killing of two brothers in Lower Dir that prompted a protest; and a reported ambush of a security convoy in Kalat and an attack on a NADRA office in Chagai, reported by Baloch outlets and unconfirmed. The Kharan deputy commissioner, abducted on 20 September, was released on 2 October after tribal elders'

mediation. Dawn analysis of 6 October described the growing use of drones by militants and, citing a UN monitoring team report, Taliban support for the TTP; the analysis also reported Pakistani strikes inside Afghanistan following the September Kohat attack.

Displacement and restrictions on civilians. Balochistan's Home Department set a deadline of 30 October for about 30,000 people (5,000 families) from the Shor Parod area of Kalat to move to designated camps under a relocation plan, warning of further proceedings against those who do not comply. BSO-Azad alleged forced displacement of residents in Pasni, Mastung, Nushki and elsewhere (an allegation). Residents of Tirah Valley, displaced in January, said a promised return on 10 October was postponed without public explanation; the agreement governing their evacuation has not been made public. In Landi Kotal, security forces banned local residents from visiting designated high-risk areas, with responsibility for any loss placed on the residents. The Minister of State for Interior told the Senate that 138,166 national identity cards have been blocked in Balochistan, including 8,875 in Makran and Rakhshan, amid concern that foreign nationals obtained Pakistani documents through family records; a senator said families, including in Gwadar, were being affected collectively. A regional committee was formed to review disputed cases.

Counter-terrorism institutions. Dawn reported on 5 October that senior Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police officers fear the proposed Police Act 2026 would make the police a 'political force'. Analyst Muhammad Amir Rana described NACTA, now led by a senior military officer and overshadowed by the 2025 National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre, as having lost its civilian character. On 11 October the federal government authorised deployment of the army in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in aid of civil power under Article 245 for the duration of the emergency (Section L).

ASSESSMENT

Authorities should ensure independent, transparent investigation of civilian casualties attributed to militants and to security operations alike, publish verifiable casualty and displacement data, and ensure that any relocation of civilians is voluntary, lawful, adequately supported and open to review. Identity-document blocking must be individualised, evidence-based and subject to appeal, and returns of displaced people should follow published agreements. Unverified operational claims should not substitute for public accountability.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 3 (life, liberty and security of person); Art. 8 (effective remedy); Art. 13 (freedom of movement and residence); Art. 15 (right to a nationality).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 6 (right to life), Art. 2(3) (effective remedy), Art. 12 (liberty of movement and choice of residence) and Art. 26; UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Principles 6 (protection against arbitrary displacement) and 28–29 (return and reintegration); Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law (protection of civilians; Rule 129 on forced movement of civilians), binding on all parties including armed groups; UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 4 (due process); Art. 15 (freedom of movement); Art. 14 (dignity); Art. 245 (armed forces acting in aid of civil power, subject to law).

Sources: [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [19] [20] [21] [22] [23] [24] [25] [26] [27] [28] [29] [30] [31]

E. ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES, ABDUCTIONS AND UNIDENTIFIED BODIES

The Baloch National Movement (BNM) held a photo exhibition outside the United Nations office in Geneva as part of a three-day campaign (24–26 September) on alleged enforced disappearances and collective punishment in Balochistan, pointing to years of protests by families, including the long march led by Voice for Baloch Missing Persons and prolonged hunger strikes. These are the organisation's claims.

Police found at least five bullet-riddled bodies in Khuzdar and Surab on 3 October: three in Ferozabad (Khuzdar), identified and handed to heirs, and two unidentified men in Mal Shahorai, Surab. An unidentified elderly man's body was also recovered at a taxi stand in Quetta. Unidentified bodies have been recovered in Balochistan over the years, some later identified as people previously reported missing; families and rights groups allege some were victims of enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing, which authorities have denied in many cases.

In Islamabad, the High Court heard on 5 October the petition of the wife of Afzal Masih, a Christian man from Malpur village who was allegedly abducted and detained in a private outhouse and tortured. Despite explicit court orders the police could not recover him; the court granted two more days. The police told the court there was a financial dispute with the two nominated persons. Separately, the Kharan deputy commissioner was abducted for nearly two weeks (Section D), and the whereabouts of a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial minister reported abducted in September remained unknown after 18 days, according to PTI (Section L).

ASSESSMENT

Pakistan should criminalise enforced disappearance, sign and ratify the ICED, disclose the fate and whereabouts of all disappeared persons, ensure forensic documentation and notification of families before any burial of unidentified bodies, and establish an independent, victim-centred mechanism with powers to prosecute. Police must comply with court recovery orders without delay.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 3 (life, liberty and security); Art. 5 (no torture); Art. 6 (recognition as a person before the law); Art. 9 (no arbitrary arrest or detention).
International conventions and standards	ICED Arts. 1–2, 12, 17 and 24 (not signed or ratified by Pakistan); 1992 UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; ICCPR Arts. 2(3), 6, 7, 9 and 16; CAT Arts. 2 and 12–13 (prevention; prompt and impartial investigation); UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 10 (grounds of arrest, counsel, production before a magistrate within 24 hours); Art. 10A (fair trial); Art. 14 (dignity; no torture for evidence); Art. 199 (High Court habeas corpus jurisdiction).

Sources: [22] [32] [33] [34]

F. FAIR-TRIAL CONCERNS, DETENTION AND PRISON CONDITIONS

Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha. The lawyer couple, re-arrested on 17 September just after the Supreme Court suspended their 17-year PECA sentences, were indicted on 7 October by Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra of Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court No. 2 in the ‘barrier removal’ case concerning a 25 October 2024 incident on the route of a visiting cricket team. Their counsel said she had waited two hours without being allowed to see her clients and that case copies had not been supplied; the accused appeared by video link. On 10 October the ATC disposed of a plea to drop the terrorism charge. On 15 October the court, after police said they lacked a vehicle and escorts because of deployments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ordered a trial inside Adiala jail. On 21 October it appointed a state counsel to cross-examine prosecution witnesses on the defence’s behalf after defence lawyers sought an adjournment and could not cross-examine. On **29 October** the court convicted both under sections 186 and 353 PPC and section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act and sentenced them to one, two and ten years’ rigorous imprisonment respectively with fines, to run concurrently – an effective 10 years each – acquitting them of other charges. Their family called the trial a sham. Dawn’s editorial said the ‘crime’ did not justify a trial under terrorism law and called on higher courts to hear the appeal swiftly. In a separate case on 5 October a different ATC judge reprimanded a DSP for failing to produce the case record.

Political detainees. The Lahore High Court on 12 October directed jail authorities to provide heart medication to Dr Uzma Khan, one of Imran Khan’s three sisters held for nearly three weeks under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance. The Federal Constitutional Court on 14 October rejected Bushra Bibi’s plea for suspension of her seven-year sentence, expecting the high court to decide her main appeal promptly; her appeal alleged unlawful solitary confinement and denial of access to family and counsel. Lahore’s ATC extended PTI leader Hammad Azhar’s physical remand by 12 days in the Jinnah House case on 15 October, with police seeking a polygraph test. On 21 October the Peshawar High Court provisionally ordered the de-sealing of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa deputy speaker’s official residence and restrained her arrest under the MPO Ordinance.

Prisons. The 2026 prison data report by the National Commission for Human Rights and Justice Project Pakistan found that jails built for 68,832 people held 110,513, more than 160 per cent of capacity, with about three in four inmates awaiting trial; the prison population has risen about 50 per cent since 2019. An HRCP policy paper put the national under-trial share at 73.41 per cent in 2024 and reported Punjab holding 74,773 prisoners in 45 prisons

against a capacity of 39,204 (190.73 per cent) in September 2026, including 54,932 under-trial prisoners (769 juveniles). At least 113 people in Punjab, including 11 children, remained in prison despite being granted bail because they could not furnish surety, and only seven prisoners were released on parole in 2024. The Lahore High Court expressed concern on 7 October over more than 500 missing girls in Punjab and sought a detailed police report.

Killings in police operations. On 20 October Islamabad police said the prime suspect in the fraud case linked to student Laiba Ijaz's death was shot dead by his accomplices who opened fire on police; the Senate Human Rights Committee had taken notice of the case. On 21 October lawyers and journalists questioned the death of a Multan suspect in an alleged encounter with Punjab's Crime Control Department (CCD), which the HRCP has accused earlier this year of a 'deliberate policy of staged police encounters' (the CCD denies this). Such deaths of suspects in custody or encounters call for independent investigation.

ASSESSMENT

Court orders must be honoured and terrorism law should not be stretched to cover non-violent protest acts. Detainees must have unhindered access to counsel of their choice, copies of the record, prompt hearings and humane conditions, and jail trials should be exceptional and open to the public and the press. Pre-trial detention should be a last resort: authorities should expand bail on non-financial terms, release prisoners held solely for inability to pay surety, and publish prison data. Every death in an encounter or custody must be independently investigated.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 8 (effective remedy); Art. 9 (no arbitrary detention); Art. 10 (independent and impartial tribunal; public hearing); Art. 11 (presumption of innocence; guarantees of defence); Art. 5 (no cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 14 (fair trial; counsel of choice; adequate facilities), Art. 9(3) (pre-trial detention not to be the general rule), Arts. 9–10 and 2(3); Human Rights Committee General Comment 32; UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (Principles 16–18); Nelson Mandela Rules (Rules 1, 12–13, 43–45); UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (Tokyo Rules); CRC Art. 37(b)–(c) (detention of children as a last resort); ICCPR Art. 6 and UN Principles on Extra-legal Executions (killings in encounters).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 10A (fair trial); Art. 10 (safeguards on arrest and detention, including Art. 10(4)–(8) on preventive detention); Arts. 4 and 9 (due process; liberty); Art. 14 (dignity); Art. 175(3) (separation of judiciary from executive); Art. 199 (writ jurisdiction).

Sources: [35] [36] [37] [38] [39] [40] [41] [42] [43] [44] [45] [46] [47] [48] [49] [50]

G. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, INCLUDING HONOUR KILLINGS AND FEMICIDE

Violence. Cases of killings of women and girls continued to dominate reporting. A divorced woman, Saba Bibi (21), was allegedly killed in the name of 'honour' by seven suspects, including her father and uncle, in Vehari on 11 October. In Rawalpindi and Islamabad, two women (Louiza Bibi and Namiya Bibi) were beaten to death with iron tools in their house and a third, Riffat Bibi (32), was shot dead in Islamabad by her brother-in-law, a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police official who fled; the killers were still at large when reported on 24 October. A 22-year-old woman was strangled with a wire in Lahore on 7 October after a history of domestic violence (her father-in-law was arrested and the husband sought). In Faisalabad a man was held for killing his wife on 1 October and staging the crime as an attack by unidentified gunmen, allegedly in order to remarry. A 17-year-old girl with a mental disability and her newborn died in Sahiwal, seven months after she was allegedly gang-raped by her cousin and two others. Police in Rawalpindi arrested the husband of an Additional Deputy Commissioner after she filed an FIR for violence and illegal confinement; a woman constable in Khanpur, allegedly married against her will and abused, attempted suicide while on duty, and police disputed her account that she had reported the abuse. A Sahiwal insurance employee was booked for raping a married woman and extorting Rs1.06 million through blackmail. A woman was tortured by a fake 'exorcist' who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

The Hina Javed case. Following Hina Javed's murder in Rawalpindi in August, the Punjab Chief Minister formed a new high-level team led by the Director General of the CCD on 30 September. Her brother said on 17 October that he had no trust in the police or the committee and demanded a judicial commission, citing a DNA summary report that the DNA and fingerprints of the three nominated suspects (her husband, father-in-law and an employee) matched her

body, clothing and the alleged weapon, and that she was strangled after resistance. The family repeated its demand in an open letter on 25 October. These are the family's allegations and the contents of a report that has not been tested in court.

Courts and policy. An Islamabad anti-rape court sentenced a man to death on 23 October for repeatedly sexually abusing his stepdaughter, relying on DNA, medical evidence and the girl's testimony. The Supreme Court on 13 October condemned the customs of ghag, swara and watta satta while upholding the death sentence of a man who murdered a girl who refused his marriage proposal, holding that a refusal is not a blow to male ego and that a woman has the right to choose her partner. On 7 October a five-member bench ruled that a marriage may be dissolved on grounds of shiqaq (marital discord) even if cruelty is not proven. The court also sought assistance on whether a rape conviction can rest solely on DNA in a case involving a deaf and speech-impaired woman, after noting that an expert was not summoned to record her statement. On 28 October the Ministry of Human Rights, the Legal Aid Society and UNFPA launched a Bench Book for judges of gender-based violence courts in Islamabad, with a national study on low conviction rates. The State Bank launched the second Banking on Equality policy on 13 October, saying the gender gap in financial inclusion narrowed from 39 to 29 per cent between 2021 and 2025. Dawn also reported that literacy among those aged 10 and above is 54 per cent for women against 73 per cent for men (HIES 2024–25). Retired Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah criticised the Federal Constitutional Court's ruling that the 2010 workplace harassment law covers only conduct of a sexual nature.

Public statements. Capt (retd) Muhammad Safdar, husband of the Punjab Chief Minister, drew criticism, including from the Chief Minister, for remarks at a Chiniot rally mocking women who say 'my body, my choice' and for calling the late human rights lawyer Asma Jahangir 'cursed'. The Pakistan Bar Council vice chairman and the outgoing Supreme Court Bar Association executive condemned the remarks. On 21 October the Federal Constitutional Court heard the appeal in the Meesha Shafi–Ali Zafar defamation and PECA case and directed the federation to file its reply (see Section J).

ASSESSMENT

Police must register complaints immediately and investigate without regard to family or social pressure. The State should adopt a coordinated, adequately funded national strategy that includes protection orders, confidential shelters, specialised investigation cells and courts, a national case-tracking register, rehabilitation for survivors, and legislation ensuring that non-sexual workplace harassment has an effective remedy. Public officials and their relatives should refrain from degrading remarks about women and about victims' advocates.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 3 (life, liberty and security); Art. 5 (no cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment); Art. 7 (equal protection); Art. 8 (effective remedy); Art. 16 (equal rights in marriage and at its dissolution).
International conventions and standards	CEDAW Arts. 1–2, 5(a), 15–16 and General Recommendations 19, 33 (access to justice) and 35 (gender-based violence as discrimination; State due diligence); CEDAW Arts. 10, 11 and 13–14 (education, work, credit and rural women); ICCPR Arts. 3, 6, 7 and 26; ICESCR Art. 3; CAT Arts. 1 and 12 (official acquiescence; investigation).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 14 (dignity); Art. 25(2) (no discrimination on grounds of sex) and Art. 25(3); Art. 34 (full participation of women); Art. 35 (protection of family, mother and child); Arts. 23–24 (property).

Sources: [51] [52] [53] [54] [55] [56] [57] [58] [59] [60] [61] [62] [63] [64] [65] [66] [67] [68] [69] [70] [71] [72] [73]

H. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

School safety. The roof of the Al-Khair private school in Afridi Abad, Peshawar, collapsed on the morning of 15 October, killing 33 people, including 32 students aged seven to 14 and a teacher; about 20 children were injured. Police said the building was structurally weak and the roof overloaded with additional construction; the owner was arrested and an inquiry began. Dawn noted that earlier concerns about the building had reportedly been raised and listed previous collapses, including 14 children killed in a Lahore tuition centre in June 2026 and five killed when a wall of a dilapidated government school collapsed in Karachi on 11 September.

Online exploitation. The UNICEF–ECPAT–INTERPOL *Disrupting Harm in Pakistan* study (September 2026), presented to the UN General Assembly, found that about one in 16 internet-using children aged 12 to 17 – roughly 1.5 million – experienced technology-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse in a year; in 85 per cent of incidents the perpetrator was known to the child, and social media accounted for 44 per cent of reported instances. The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) announced on 25 October that it had broken up an international child-exploitation network in which a father allegedly produced and sold explicit videos of his own children, aged four and five, through Telegram groups paid for with cryptocurrency (the agency's claim). Kaspersky reported risks of deepfakes, grooming and blackmail. The National Commission on the Rights of Child told the Islamabad High Court that protecting minors from online harm is a state duty and recommended more resources for the NCCIA, special investigation units, age verification and a child-rights review of PECA; the PTA told the court that a minimum age for social media would require legislation.

Violence against children. A 15-year-old orphan, Waseem Abbas, was allegedly run over and killed in Multan; child-protection bodies demanded justice, the suspect was later killed in an alleged encounter and lawyers allegedly assaulted him during a court appearance. A 15-year-old girl in Rawalpindi was found dead on 8 October at her maternal uncle's house with marks of sexual assault and torture. The parents of a seven-year-old girl allegedly raped and killed in Noshki asked for the case to be transferred to the special court in Quetta. An eight-year-old boy was shot dead in Vehari on 12 October after resisting an alleged rape attempt. A madrassah teacher was arrested for beating a five-year-old in Rahim Yar Khan. On 16 October the Supreme Court denied bail to an accused in the rape of a five-year-old girl and directed the trial court to conclude the trial quickly. As noted in Section F, 11 children were held in Punjab despite bail, and over 500 girls were reported missing in Punjab.

ASSESSMENT

The State should audit and certify the structural safety of all schools, including private schools, and hold owners and officials accountable; strengthen oversight of madrassas and residential child-care institutions; adopt a rights-based online child-protection framework (reporting channels, platform duties, digital literacy) rather than relying on age bans alone; implement child-sensitive investigation and prosecution; and end corporal punishment in all settings.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 25(2) (special care for childhood); Art. 26 (education); Arts. 3 and 5 (security; no degrading treatment).
International conventions and standards	CRC Art. 3 (best interests), Art. 6 (life and development), Art. 19 (protection from violence and abuse), Art. 28(2) (school discipline consistent with dignity), Arts. 34–35 (sexual exploitation; abduction), Art. 37 and General Comments 8 (corporal punishment) and 25 (digital environment); CRC Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; ICESCR Art. 13.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 25(3) (special provision for children); Art. 25A (free and compulsory education, ages 5–16); Art. 35 (protection of mother and child); Arts. 9 and 14 (security of person; dignity); Art. 11(3) (child labour).

Sources: [47] [48] [50] [74] [75] [76] [77] [78] [79] [80] [81] [82] [83] [84] [85]

I. FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND PROTEST

The PTI launched a ‘long march’ on 4 October from Lakki Marwat, led by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi to demand the release of Imran Khan. By 8 October, on its fifth day, the convoy had reached Peshawar; the route and destination had changed repeatedly. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority confirmed to Dawn that it had ordered a temporary suspension of mobile service on the instructions of ‘higher authorities’ as a security precaution, and some private schools closed. Section 144 orders were imposed in several districts. The PTI alleged that party workers and members were detained and, on 8 October, that a provincial minister and an MNA remained abducted (Section L). The Peshawar High Court sought Mr Afridi’s reply to a contempt petition alleging he used an official helicopter to join the march in breach of a 2025 judgment. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif urged the PTI to end the march and resolve issues through dialogue; talks between government and opposition ended in deadlock.

After the federal government imposed emergency and governor’s rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 11 October (Section L), the PTI said Mr Afridi had been ‘taken into custody’; Dawn could not confirm this at the time. Districts reported containers on roads, closures of educational institutions, postponed examinations and detentions: about 140 workers were detained in Swabi, 15 in Charsadda and more than two dozen in Shangla, according to Dawn correspondents, while Peshawar banned gatherings for seven days under Section 144. On 13 October a PTI protest in Bara, Khyber district, turned violent: government buildings were set ablaze, police used tear gas and live fire, at least five protesters’ injuries were confirmed, and police said 50 people were arrested. The province’s information adviser said 42 ‘PTI-affiliated miscreants’ had been arrested, 25 of whom she described as illegal Afghans; Dawn could not independently verify this. The PTI asked the National Assembly Speaker for production orders for nine detained MNAs. Opposition parties announced a ‘democratic struggle’, and bar associations observed strikes.

ASSESSMENT

Blanket restrictions on movement and assembly, mobile network suspensions, container blockades and mass preventive arrests should be necessary, proportionate and subject to judicial review. Authorities should negotiate with organisers, ensure that force is used only as a last resort and in line with international standards, investigate injuries and deaths during protests, and release anyone held solely for planning or attending a peaceful protest. Party leaders have a duty to prevent violence and damage to property.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 20(1) (peaceful assembly and association); Art. 19 (expression); Art. 9 (no arbitrary arrest or detention); Art. 21 (participation in government).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 21 (peaceful assembly), Arts. 19, 22 and 9; Human Rights Committee General Comment 37 (limits on blanket bans and internet shutdowns); UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 (rights apply online); UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 16 (freedom of assembly, subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of public order); Art. 17 (association; political parties); Art. 19; Art. 10 (safeguards against arbitrary arrest and preventive detention); Art. 15 (movement); Art. 245 (armed forces in aid of civil power).

Sources: [86] [87] [88] [89] [90] [91]

J. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE PRESS

The new head of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) announced a “zero-tolerance policy against fake news and anti-state propaganda” and set up ‘cyber patrolling units’ in every region. A Dawn editorial of 6 October noted that neither term has a clear legal meaning and asked what is being monitored, for what purpose and under what legal authority, warning of mass surveillance. In a separate directive the agency’s director general ordered strict monitoring of accounts spreading fake news.

Aaj TV removed anchor Munizae Jahangir from her programme and then Peshawar Bureau Chief Farzana Ali, who had written publicly about not being able to ask the right questions; journalists, political leaders and civil society condemned the moves as censorship. Punjab MPA Chaudhry Naeem Aijaz filed an application in an Islamabad sessions court against journalist Israr Ahmed Rajpoot over alleged harassment and 216 ‘false cases’ on social media; Mr Rajpoot, an overseas-based crime reporter, said he is reporting on matters of public interest. A report on journalists’ mental health recounted that newsrooms provide little psychological support to reporters who survive

abduction, torture or violence. On 21 October the Federal Constitutional Court asked the federal government to reply in the appeal by Meesha Shafi and Ali Zafar, in which the appellants argue that section 20 of PECA conflicts with fundamental rights. Mobile network suspensions during the long march (Section I) also restricted access to information.

ASSESSMENT

Pakistan should amend or repeal the provisions of PECA on ‘false information’ and defamation, define any regulated speech narrowly in law, subject online monitoring to independent judicial oversight and publish its legal basis, protect journalists from retaliation and provide psychosocial support, and ensure that dismissals of journalists are not the result of political or state pressure.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 19 (opinion and expression); Art. 12 (no arbitrary interference with privacy or reputation); Art. 23 (just conditions of work).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 19 and Human Rights Committee General Comment 34 (criminal defamation and “false news” offences; protection of journalists), Art. 17 (privacy) and Art. 14; UN General Assembly Resolution 68/167 (right to privacy in the digital age); UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 (rights apply online); UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 19 (freedom of speech and press, subject to reasonable restrictions); Art. 19A (right to information); Art. 14 (dignity and privacy of home); Art. 17 (association, including unions); Arts. 10 and 10A; Art. 37(e) (just and humane conditions of work).

Sources: [72] [92] [93] [94] [95]

K. HEALTH RIGHTS AND FOOD SECURITY

Pakistan’s first nationally representative mental-health survey, published in the British Medical Journal, found that nearly one in three adults (from a sample of about 18,000) lives with a diagnosable mental or behavioural disorder, according to the Pakistan Psychiatric Society researchers who led it.

A new case of polio was confirmed in Khyber district, bringing this year’s total to six (five in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one in Sindh), according to Mashriq TV; Dawn reported that Bannu Division, where four cases occurred, reached only 86 per cent of children in the latest campaign and recorded 4,701 vaccine refusals, while Peshawar had 5,635 refusals and 10,558 children missed. The Food and Agriculture Organisation said over 60 per cent of Pakistanis cannot afford a healthy diet and urged an overhaul of the agrifood system (see also Section P on the 2026 Global Hunger Index). A 10-year-old girl died and two sisters were critically ill after allegedly eating poisonous plants while gathering vegetables in Torghar.

ASSESSMENT

The State should integrate mental health into primary care with adequate funding, address refusal and access barriers in polio-affected districts including through community engagement and security for vaccination teams, and establish measurable national targets for access to nutritious food and for the reduction of malnutrition.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 25(1) (adequate standard of living, including food and medical care); Art. 3 (life).
International conventions and standards	ICESCR Art. 12 and General Comment 14 (highest attainable standard of health, including mental health), Art. 11 and General Comment 12 (food); CRC Arts. 6 and 24; ICCPR Art. 6; CEDAW Art. 12; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Art. 25.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (right to life, read by the superior courts to cover quality of life); Art. 38(d) (basic necessities of life, including medical relief); Art. 35 (protection of mother and child); Art. 4 (due process).

Sources: [96] [97] [98] [99] [100]

L. DEMOCRACY, EMERGENCY RULE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Emergency and governor's rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On 11 October the federal cabinet imposed an emergency under Article 232 and governor's rule under Article 234 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, citing the provincial government's "deliberate disengagement" from the fight against terrorism; the President approved the summary, a technocratic council and a new chief secretary were appointed, and the army was authorised to deploy in aid of civil power. Initial reports said the emergency covered 12 districts; the law minister said on 14 October that it applies to the whole province. The National Assembly and Senate passed resolutions on 14 October and a joint sitting endorsed the measures on 15 October for two months, over strong opposition objections. The government says it had "no option left" after talks with the opposition failed; the PPP says the measure could end if a counter-terrorism plan is agreed. The PTI, other opposition parties, the TTAP alliance and bar associations denounced it as an assault on the mandate of a government with a two-thirds majority and on provincial autonomy; the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council observed a 'black day' and Lahore bar bodies said they would challenge it. Legal analysts noted that Article 234 requires a breakdown of constitutional machinery and that, on earlier court rulings, a chief minister and cabinet are not removed by a proclamation alone. A JUI-F senator argued that no governor's report was presented. The Peshawar High Court issued notices on 20 October and adjourned the hearing to 10 November; one lawyer argued that Article 245 may bar the court from hearing the petition. The TTAP suspended talks until a meeting with Imran Khan is arranged and information on his health is provided, and on 22 October Dawn observed that both the PML-N and the PPP had offered renewed dialogue on counter-terrorism.

Detentions and conduct of parties. The PTI alleged that Mr Afridi and nine MNAs had been detained (production orders were requested), and that its provincial minister Fazal Shakoor and an MNA had been abducted weeks earlier; Dawn could not confirm the claims at the time of reporting. The PTI's chairman said the party had never supported terrorism but that counter-terrorism policy should be reviewed. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial cabinet had approved a Police Act 2026 on 23 September, which police officers fear will politicise the force (Section D).

Local government elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan on 15 October rejected the Punjab government's proposal to hold local government polls in phases on 4, 11 and 18 April 2027, which cited smog, fog and Ramazan; the Commission had proposed 14 December. Punjab has not held local government elections since 2015, and elected councils completed their terms on 31 December 2021.

ASSESSMENT

Emergency powers must be strictly necessary, proportionate, time-limited and subject to effective parliamentary and judicial review; the elected provincial government should be restored at the earliest, and political disputes resolved by dialogue. Elected representatives should be arrested only on specific, lawful charges with prompt judicial oversight, and allegations of abduction of public officials investigated. Local government elections should be held without further delay.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 21 (participation in government through genuine elections); Art. 20 (assembly and association); Art. 9 (no arbitrary arrest).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 25 (political participation), Art. 22 (association), Arts. 19, 9 and 26; ICCPR Art. 4 and Human Rights Committee General Comment 29 (states of emergency: strict necessity, proportionality, non-derogable rights).
Constitution of Pakistan	Arts. 232 and 234 (proclamation of emergency; failure of constitutional machinery in a province); Art. 245 (armed forces in aid of civil power); Art. 17(2) (right to form or belong to a political party); Art. 19; Arts. 9–10 (liberty; arrest safeguards); Art. 25 (equality); Art. 140A (local government); Art. 218(3) (Election Commission's duty to ensure honest, just and fair elections).

Sources: [90] [91] [101] [102] [103] [104] [105] [106] [107] [108] [109] [110] [111] [112]

M. AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The AJK Legislative Assembly Speaker, Chaudhry Tariq Farooq, called on 15 October for broad-based consensus on the future of the refugee seats, whose legitimacy was contested in the recent elections, urging dialogue and reform. The seats remain a source of political tension, as the September issue noted. Four men were killed on 12 October when a landmine exploded near the Line of Control in Hajira tehsil, Poonch district, while they were repairing a spring-water pipeline; the AJK government said it floated in from the Indian side, citing unclear border demarcation. No independent verification of the cause was available.

ASSESSMENT

AJK authorities should pursue an inclusive dialogue on representation, including the reserved seats, restore communications access where restrictions remain and review counter-terrorism listings used against activists. Mine clearance, risk education and compensation for civilians near the Line of Control should be prioritised, and the facts of the Hajira incident investigated.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 3 (life, liberty and security); Art. 19 (expression); Art. 21 (participation in government).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Arts. 6, 19, 21 and 25; customary international humanitarian law on landmines and protection of civilians (Rules 81–83); Human Rights Committee General Comment 37.
Constitution of Pakistan	AJK is governed by the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Interim Constitution Act, 1974 (fundamental rights provisions); Arts. 9, 16, 17 and 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan are cited as the national benchmark.

Sources: [113] [114]

N. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

A Dawn analysis of 38 years of satellite imagery found that the Indus is being pushed eastward along an 85-kilometre stretch between Layyah and Taunsa Barrage. In this year's flood season it destroyed Basti Kanjal, a settlement of more than 500 houses, and washed away other villages; since June about 5,000 acres of farmland have been lost and, according to news reports, 100,000 people have been displaced. The author concludes that the river is being pushed rather than wandering naturally. The UN Secretary-General visited the National Disaster Management Authority headquarters during his visit to Pakistan on 6–8 October (Section O).

ASSESSMENT

Flood-plain management, embankment policy and encroachments on river channels should be reviewed with affected communities; displaced families should be compensated and resettled with secure land rights; and early-warning, disaster-preparedness and adaptation finance should be gender-responsive and reach riverine communities.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 25(1) (adequate standard of living); Art. 3 (life); Art. 17 (property); Art. 22 (economic, social and cultural rights).
International conventions and standards	ICESCR Arts. 11–12 (food; housing; health; healthy environment); UN General Assembly Resolution 76/300 (right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment); UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Principles 18–19; Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; Paris Agreement (adaptation; loss and damage); CEDAW Art. 14 (rural women).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9A (clean, healthy and sustainable environment, added by the 26th Amendment); Art. 9 (right to life, read to include a healthy environment); Arts. 23–24 (property); Art. 4 (due process); Art. 199 (enforcement).

Sources: [115] [116]

O. GSP+, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Speaking to the Pakistan Textile Council in Karachi on 21 October, EU Ambassador Raimundas Karoblis said the EU is not introducing new GSP+ standards but expects demonstrable improvements, particularly on human rights and the rule of law, and that Pakistan should prioritise implementation of existing commitments over new legislation. The EU's new GSP framework takes effect on 1 January 2027; existing beneficiaries are covered under transitional arrangements and must reapply by the end of 2028. Pakistan's exports to the EU were reportedly $8.96 billion in 2025–26, and the ambassador said the EU would deepen engagement, beginning with short-term improvements followed by a credible action plan with timelines and indicators. He referred to the Commission's assessment of 2023–25, published on 16 July 2026. Textile industry leaders said the EU–India free trade agreement would add competitive pressure even if Pakistan retains GSP+.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited Pakistan on 6–8 October, praising Pakistan's mediation between the United States and Iran, and met the President, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Chief of Defence Forces; the Foreign Office said discussions covered Kashmir, Afghanistan, counter-terrorism and the Indus Waters Treaty.

ASSESSMENT

Pakistan should adopt a time-bound, benchmarked plan, developed with civil society, to address the issues identified by the European Commission and publish regular compliance data. Many concerns – enforced disappearances, press freedom, minority protection, fair trial and the death penalty – coincide with issues documented in this issue.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 28 (an international order in which rights can be fully realised); Arts. 2 and 7 (non-discrimination).
International conventions and standards	GSP+ requires effective implementation of 27 core international conventions (Annex VIII to Regulation (EU) No 978/2012), including the ICCPR, ICESCR, CAT, CEDAW, CRC and the ILO fundamental conventions; UN Charter Arts. 1(3) and 55–56 (promotion of human rights).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 8 (laws inconsistent with fundamental rights are void); Arts. 9, 10A, 19 and 20 (life and liberty, fair trial, expression and religion – the rights at issue in the EU's concerns).

Sources: [116] [117] [118]

P. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Poverty and hunger. UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index put 38.3 per cent of Pakistanis in multidimensional poverty, against 19.3 per cent for South Asia (the estimates use surveys from different years, Dawn noted). The World Bank said Pakistan is home to almost half of the extremely poor population of the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan region. The 2026 Global Hunger Index recorded Pakistan's score as the highest in South Asia, which Dawn attributed to weak growth, food inflation, disasters and joblessness. In Balochistan, a Dawn feature described agricultural workers earning very low monthly wages.

Macroeconomy and prices. The IMF projects growth of 3.5 per cent and inflation of 9.9 per cent in FY27, and a 1.3 per cent GDP contraction in 2026 for the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan region owing to the war involving Iran; the finance minister said the twin deficits had fallen to 2.6 per cent of GDP. Goods exports were $30.14 billion in the year to June 2026, 5.9 per cent below the previous year; textile exporters warned of a steep decline from October to December. The government said wheat was abundant and warned hoarders as flour prices rose. The Pak-Iran border trade remained partly restricted. Only seven per cent of young people have access to formal technical and vocational training (regional average 22 per cent), at a reported cost of $31.5 billion a year in lost productivity.

Labour safety. A Dawn column recalled the deaths of two sanitation workers, aged 17 and 35, while cleaning an underground tank in Karachi in September, and described how workers in the sector are routinely exposed to fatal hazards.

ASSESSMENT

Economic stabilisation should translate into protection for the poorest: targeted social protection indexed to inflation, price monitoring for staples, investment in skills and decent jobs for the young, and enforcement of occupational health and safety standards, with a ban on manual cleaning of sewers and tanks without protective equipment.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 22 (social security); Art. 23 (just and favourable conditions of work); Art. 24 (rest and leisure); Art. 25(1) (adequate standard of living); Art. 3 (life).
International conventions and standards	ICESCR Art. 6 (work), Art. 7(b) (safe and healthy working conditions), Art. 9 (social security), Art. 11 (adequate standard of living and food; General Comment 12) and Art. 2(1) (progressive realisation using maximum available resources); ILO Convention No. 155 (occupational safety and health); ICCPR Art. 6 (duty to protect life from foreseeable threats).
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (right to life); Art. 11(3) (no child below 14 in any factory, mine or other hazardous employment); Art. 17 (trade unions); Art. 37(e) (just and humane conditions of work); Art. 38(a)–(d) (well-being of the people; facilities for work and adequate livelihood; social security); Art. 3 (elimination of exploitation).

Sources: [119] [120] [121] [122] [123] [124] [125] [126] [127] [128] [129] [130] [131]

Q. RIGHT TO INFORMATION

A Dawn feature published on 4 October found that the civil-society seat on the federal Pakistan Information Commission and on Sindh's commission has been vacant since January 2024, in Punjab since March 2025 and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since April 2026. Each commission is meant to include a retired bureaucrat, a senior jurist and a civil-society representative; where two serving members disagree there is no third to form a majority. Balochistan's commission, required by its 2021 law to be set up within 120 days, began functioning only in 2025, with two commissioners appointed and the posts of chief commissioner and another commissioner still vacant. A former federal commissioner said the vacancy removes a balance built into the law.

ASSESSMENT

Governments should fill all information-commission vacancies through open, merit-based appointments that include civil-society representatives, resource the commissions and publish annual enforcement data, so that Article 19A is not rendered meaningless by understaffed and slow appeal bodies.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 19 (freedom to seek, receive and impart information).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 19(2) and Human Rights Committee General Comment 34, paras. 18–19 (access to information held by public bodies); ICCPR Art. 25(a) (conduct of public affairs); UN Convention against Corruption Arts. 10 and 13 (public information; participation of society); SDG target 16.10.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 19A (right to information in all matters of public importance); Art. 19 (freedom of speech); Art. 4 (due process).

Sources: [132]

R. DEATH PENALTY

On 17 October a Lahore sessions court sentenced four men to death under section 295-C PPC in a 2022 blasphemy case registered by the then FIA cybercrime wing, with additional terms of life imprisonment under section 295-B, 10 years under 295-A, three years under 298-A and seven years under section 11 of PECA; the court noted procedural defects in the forensic evidence but found it sufficient, and the death sentences are subject to High Court confirmation. On 10 October the Supreme Court upheld a blasphemy death sentence in the Talagang case (Section C), and on 13 October it upheld a death sentence in a murder case while rejecting patriarchal customs (Section G). An Islamabad anti-rape court imposed death in a child sexual abuse case on 23 October.

Ahead of the World Day Against the Death Penalty (10 October), Justice Project Pakistan, with EU support, launched a policy brief, *Capital Punishment in Islam*, arguing that death-penalty reform need not pit Islam against human rights and that both traditions share principles of the protection of life, restraint, mercy, due process and preventing irreversible injustice, with attention to evidentiary certainty and the principle of doubt.

ASSESSMENT

Pakistan should reinstate and formalise a moratorium on executions, remove the death penalty for offences that do not meet the ‘most serious crimes’ threshold – including blasphemy – ensure strict fair-trial guarantees and automatic, thorough appellate review in capital cases, protect the right to seek pardon or commutation, and publish annual data on death sentences and executions.

APPLICABLE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS	
UDHR	Art. 3 (life, liberty and security); Art. 5 (no cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment); Arts. 10–11 (fair trial; presumption of innocence).
International conventions and standards	ICCPR Art. 6(2) (most serious crimes only), Art. 6(4) (right to seek pardon or commutation), Art. 7, Art. 14 (including 14(5), review by a higher tribunal) and General Comment 36; ECOSOC Safeguards Guaranteeing Protection of the Rights of Those Facing the Death Penalty (1984); UN General Assembly resolutions calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty (e.g. 77/222); CRC Art. 37(a); CAT Arts. 2 and 16.
Constitution of Pakistan	Art. 9 (security of person); Art. 10A (fair trial); Art. 4 (due process); Art. 45 (President’s power to grant pardon, reprieve and respite and to remit, suspend or commute sentences); Art. 14 (dignity).

Sources: [12] [13] [63] [64] [133]

2. Overall Assessment

The cases reviewed in October 2026 point to recurring structural weaknesses across Pakistan's human rights landscape: policies that remove Afghan residents from education and the country regardless of court orders; vulnerability of minorities to mob violence following blasphemy accusations, and protracted legal impasses over abducted minor girls; the continued use of the death penalty for blasphemy; an acute deterioration in security in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with unverified casualty claims, forced relocations of civilians and collective measures such as blocking identity cards; abductions and unidentified bodies without effective investigation; the use of anti-terrorism law and jail trials against lawyers and protesters, and a prison system in which three in four inmates await trial; recurring killings of women and girls and distrust in police investigations; the exposure of children to unsafe schools, abuse and online exploitation; the displacement of an elected provincial government under emergency powers, accompanied by detentions and communications shutdowns; narrowing space for expression through 'fake news' enforcement and surveillance; and deepening poverty and hunger with weak transparency institutions.

The European Union's message that GSP+ preferences depend on implementation rather than legislation reinforces the importance of the issues documented here. Positive judicial and institutional steps during the month show that remedies are possible: the Peshawar High Court's stay on deportations; the Supreme Court's rulings against patriarchal customs and denial of bail to child-rape accused; the Lahore High Court's scrutiny of missing girls; the Bench Book for gender-based violence courts; the NCRC's child-online-protection proposals; and the Peshawar High Court's protection of the deputy speaker from arrest. Their impact will depend on independence, prompt implementation, transparent reporting and protection from retaliation.

Note on sources. This issue draws on press reports (Dawn, Voicepk.net, Quetta Voice, The Baloch Circle, Business Recorder, Mashriq TV), research by CRSS, PICSS, HRCP, NCHR/JPP and UN bodies, and statements of civil-society organisations. Allegations in FIRs, claims by parties to disputes, operational figures issued by security agencies and advocates' statistics are identified as such in the text and have not been independently verified.

3. Priority Recommendations

To the Government of Pakistan (federal)

1. **Afghan nationals:** Withdraw the PMDC directives and allow enrolled Afghan students, including women, to complete their degrees; decide pending visa applications within the time set by the courts; apply individualised, transparent risk assessment before any removal; prevent refoulement; and publish the policy relied upon.
2. **Religious minorities:** Prosecute those who lead or incite mob attacks and compensate displaced families; protect persons accused of blasphemy; enforce minimum marriage age with independent age and consent verification and protective custody for abducted minors; and complete reform of Hindu, Sikh and Christian personal laws through genuine consultation.
3. **Blasphemy and death penalty:** Expedite appeals; end the death penalty for blasphemy and other offences that do not meet the 'most serious crimes' threshold; reinstate a formal moratorium on executions; and publish data on death sentences.
4. **Security and civilian protection:** Ensure independent investigation of civilian deaths in attacks and operations; publish verifiable casualty and displacement data; make any relocation of civilians voluntary, lawful and supported; individualise and allow appeals against identity-card blocking; and make public the Tirah return agreement.
5. **Enforced disappearances:** Criminalise enforced disappearance and ratify the ICED; establish an independent, victim-centred body able to prosecute; ensure forensic documentation and family notification before burial of unidentified bodies; and ensure police comply with court recovery orders.
6. **Fair trial and detention:** Do not use terrorism law against non-violent protest acts; ensure open trials and unhindered lawyer access; reform bail so that no one remains in custody solely for inability to pay surety; reduce prison overcrowding through alternatives to detention; and independently investigate deaths in encounters and custody.
7. **Women:** Adopt a funded national action plan against gender-based violence and femicide; train police and prosecutors using the new Bench Book; legislate a remedy for non-sexual workplace harassment; and ensure public officials refrain from demeaning statements about women and victims' advocates.
8. **Children:** Audit and certify structural safety of all schools and prosecute those responsible for the Peshawar collapse; strengthen oversight of madrassas; adopt a rights-based online-safety framework, including a child-rights review of PECA; and end corporal punishment.
9. **Assembly, expression and democracy:** Restore Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's elected government at the earliest and enter dialogue; limit Section 144, communications suspensions and preventive detention to what is necessary and proportionate; release persons held solely for peaceful protest; withdraw the 'fake news' enforcement policy and cyber-patrolling units or place them under judicial oversight; and hold local government elections without delay.
10. **Health, economic rights and transparency:** Fund mental-health and polio-eradication programmes; strengthen social protection against food inflation; enforce workplace safety standards for sanitation and other hazardous work; and fill all information-commission vacancies.
11. **GSP+:** Adopt a time-bound, benchmarked compliance roadmap developed with civil society and publish annual progress against the issues identified by the European Commission.

To provincial governments and the AJK administration

12. **Punjab:** Enforce the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2026; investigate the Sheikhupura attack; review the use of encounters by the CCD; commission an independent review of the Hina Javed investigation; and reduce prison overcrowding.
13. **Sindh:** Simplify and enforce Hindu marriage registration and anti-conversion safeguards so that abducted minor girls' cases proceed promptly.
14. **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan:** Publish disaggregated data on violence and displacement; allow safe return of displaced families; investigate abductions of officials and killings of civilians; and fill the vacant civil-society seats on information commissions.

15. **Azad Jammu and Kashmir:** Open an inclusive dialogue on representation, including reserved seats; and support mine clearance and compensation near the Line of Control.

To the judiciary and independent oversight institutions

16. Hear pending appeals and bail matters promptly, including the appeal of Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha and challenges to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa emergency; enforce orders on access to counsel, prison conditions and recovery of missing persons; and require independent age verification in minor-marriage cases.

17. Empower the National Commission for Human Rights, the National Commission on the Status of Women, the National Commission on the Rights of Child and the Election Commission to monitor, investigate and publish findings on the issues in this fact sheet.

To international partners

18. Link GSP+ and other cooperation to clear, public benchmarks on disappearances, fair trial, freedom of expression, minority protection and the death penalty; support Pakistan's ratification and implementation of the ICED; maintain refugee funding and encourage visits by UN special procedures; and support independent monitoring and survivor services for gender-based and child sexual violence.

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