

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	699
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	World Report 2024 – Pakistan
Udgivet:	11. januar 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. februar 2024

World Report 2024



Pakistan

Events of 2023

A Christian man looks at a home vandalized by a Muslim mob in Jaranwala, Pakistan, August 17, 2023.

© 2023 AP Photo/K.M. Chaudary

Pakistan's political and economic crises deepened in 2023. Following a similar playbook as its predecessors, the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif clamped down on the media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and political opposition. The authorities used draconian counterterrorism and sedition laws to intimidate peaceful critics. The government's term [ended in August](#), and an interim government headed by Caretaker Prime Minister [Anwar Kakar took over](#). Elections previously scheduled for November were [delayed due to an incomplete census](#) and constituency delimitation process.

Blasphemy-related violence against religious minorities, fostered in part by government persecution and discriminatory laws, intensified. Attacks by Islamist militants, notably the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), targeting law enforcement officials and religious minorities, killed dozens of people in 2023.

With poverty, inflation, and unemployment soaring, Pakistan faced one of the [worst economic crises](#) in its history, jeopardizing millions of people's rights to health, food, and an adequate standard of living. The insistence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on austerity and the removal of subsidies without adequate compensatory measures resulted in additional hardship for low-income groups. Pakistan remained exceedingly vulnerable to climate change and faced rates of warming considerably above the global average, making extreme climate events more frequent and intense.

In a positive development, the Sindh government [attempted to rehabilitate](#) those who suffered catastrophic losses in the 2022 floods by providing land titles and funds to construct houses for people who were previously landless. As of early August, there were [2.1 million](#) eligible beneficiaries of this program.

Freedom of Expression and Attacks on Civil Society Groups

Government threats and attacks on the media created a climate of fear among journalists and civil society groups, with many resorting to self-censorship. Authorities pressured or threatened media outlets not to criticize government institutions or the judiciary.

In the violence following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, members of his political party, Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf (PTI), [attacked the offices](#) of public broadcaster Radio Pakistan and the state-owned news agency Associated Press of Pakistan in Peshawar.

On May 11, journalist [Imran Riaz Khan](#) was arrested as he was attempting to take a flight to Oman. Khan returned [home on September 25](#); he has not been presented in court at any time since his arrest.

Pakistan's sedition law, based on a colonial-era British provision, is vague and overly broad and has often been used against political opponents and journalists. In March, the Lahore High Court [declared the sedition law unconstitutional](#). The government filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the decision and the appeal remains pending. However, the authorities continued to use sedition prosecutions. In August, Imaan Mazari-Hazir, a lawyer, and Ali Wazir, a political activist, were [charged with sedition](#) for a speech made in Islamabad. Hazir and Wazir were subsequently granted bail.

In August, the [police arrested Fayaz Zafar](#), a reporter for the Pashto-language broadcaster Voice of America Deewa (VOA Deewa), following a magistrate's order accusing him of using social media to spread "fake, offensive and hatred contents to defame and incite the public" against the government and law enforcement agencies. Zafar was later released.

NGOs reported intimidation, harassment, and surveillance of various groups by government authorities. The government used its [regulation of INGOs in Pakistan](#) policy to impede the registration and functioning of international humanitarian and human rights groups.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

The Pakistani government did not amend or repeal blasphemy law provisions that have provided a pretext for violence against religious minorities and left them vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and prosecution. The death penalty is mandatory for blasphemy, and dozens of people remained on death row as of late 2023. Since 1990, at least 65 people [have reportedly been killed](#) in Pakistan over claims of blasphemy.

Members of the Ahmadiyya religious community continue to be a major target for prosecutions under blasphemy laws and specific anti-Ahmadi laws. Militant groups and the Islamist political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) [accuse](#) Ahmadis of "posing as Muslims." Pakistan's penal code also treats "posing as Muslims" as a criminal offense. On July 25, a mob [vandalized an Ahmadiyya place of worship](#) in Karachi, Sindh province. On August 18, a mob [attacked a factory](#) owned by an Ahmadi in Lahore, accusing him of blasphemy. Instead of prosecuting the attackers, the authorities [charged eight members](#) of Ahmadi community with blasphemy.

On August 16, 2023, several hundred people [attacked a Christian settlement](#) in Faisalabad district, Punjab province, after two members of the community were accused of committing "blasphemy." The mob, armed with stones and sticks, vandalized several churches, dozens of houses, and a

cemetery. While the police [arrested 130 people](#) alleged to have been involved in the attacks, residents told local rights activists that hours before the attack, the police warned them a mob was coming but claimed they could do nothing to stop it.

Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls—including rape, murder, acid attacks, domestic violence, denial of education, sexual harassment at work, and child and forced marriage—is a serious problem throughout Pakistan. Human rights defenders [estimate](#) that roughly 1,000 women are murdered in so-called “honor killings” every year.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) [estimates](#) that 18.9 million girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18 and 4.6 million before 15. Many married girls are forced into dangerous pregnancies at a young age and pregnancies that are too closely spaced. Women from religious minority communities remain particularly vulnerable to [forced marriage](#). The government did little to stop such early and forced marriages.

There was nationwide outrage after a woman was [raped at gunpoint](#) in a park in Islamabad on February 2. Two weeks later, the Islamabad police claimed that both [alleged perpetrators](#) were killed in an exchange of gunfire while the police attempted to arrest them.

In Punjab province, [10,365 cases of violence](#) against women were reported to the police in the first four months of 2023, according to a local NGO. The actual number of incidents is likely to be much higher given barriers to reporting, harmful social norms, and ineffective and harmful responses by the [police](#). Pakistan’s conviction rate for rape is [less than 3 percent](#).

Children’s Rights

Over 6 million primary school-age children and 13 million secondary school-age children in Pakistan were out of school, [most of them girls](#). Human Rights Watch found that girls miss school for reasons including lack of schools, costs associated with studying, child marriage, harmful child labor, and gender discrimination.

Employment of child domestic workers remains prevalent despite attempts to prohibit it. In July, the case of Rizwana, a 14-year-old child [brutally tortured](#) for months while employed by a judge’s family, spotlighted the issue of abuse and mistreatment of child domestic workers. In February, an 11-year-old child domestic worker, Qabool, was beaten to death by his employer in Karachi.

Child sexual abuse remains common. The children’s rights organization Sahil [reported](#) an average of over 12 cases daily of child sexual abuse across Pakistan for the first 6 months of 2023.

Disability Rights

A lack of awareness about mental health in Pakistani society contributes to the abuse of those with psychosocial disabilities (mental health conditions). Prisoners who ask for mental health support are often mocked and denied services. The [prison system](#) lacks mental health professionals, and prison authorities tend to view any report of a mental health condition with suspicion. Psychological assessments for new prisoners are either perfunctory or not done at all. The prevalence of the use of solitary confinement in Pakistani prisons poses additional risks for people with psychosocial disabilities.

Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Law Enforcement Abuses

The TTP, Al-Qaeda, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), the ISKP, and their affiliates carried out suicide bombings and other indiscriminate attacks against security personnel that caused hundreds of civilian deaths and injuries during the year. According to a Pakistani think tank, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), there were [99 militant attacks in August](#), the highest number of attacks in month since 2014.

Violence swept across Pakistan on [May 9, 2023](#), after the police arrested former Prime Minister Imran Khan on corruption charges. Many of Khan's supporters attacked police officers and set fire to ambulances, police vehicles, and schools. Among the places [targeted](#) were the military headquarters in Rawalpindi and houses of senior military officials. Following the clashes, the police [arrested thousands](#) of members of Khan's political party, PTI, on charges of criminal intimidation, rioting, and [assault](#) on government officials. Many were charged under [vague and overbroad laws](#) prohibiting rioting and creating threats to public order; those accused of breaking and entering into restricted access military installations were tried in military courts violating principles of due process and fair trial.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Same-sex sexual conduct between men remains a criminal offense under Pakistan's criminal code, placing men who have sex with men and transgender women at a higher risk of police abuse and other forms of violence and discrimination.

Transgender women in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, remained under attack. In May, the Federal Shariat Court [ruled](#) that provisions of the Transgender Act 2018 relating the right to being legally recognized by their self-perceived gender identity and the right of inheritance for transgender people were "un-Islamic." This ruling caused great apprehension in the transgender community. The appeal against the Federal Shariat Court decision remained pending in the Supreme Court by the end of the year.

The Sindh Human Rights Commission, an independent statutory body, [issued guidance](#) to police to stop harassing and arresting transgender people. The guidance said that offenses related to poverty and homelessness should be decriminalized, an important step toward changing discriminatory laws, policies, and public attitudes in Sindh province.

Refugees

In October, the government [gave a 28-day deadline](#) for "illegal immigrants" to leave the country, warning that law enforcement agencies would forcibly deport them. According to the Pakistani authorities, there are 1.73 million unregistered Afghans living in the country. The government justified the decision to forcibly deport Afghans by claiming that Afghan nationals were involved in [most of the suicide bombing attacks](#) in Pakistan in 2023. The [UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) [responded](#) to this in a statement saying, "any refugee return must be voluntary and without any pressure to ensure protection for those seeking safety." The [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) and [UN independent human rights experts](#) also raised concerns that Afghans in Pakistan have been subjected to arrests, exploitation, and undignified treatment.

In 2023, Pakistani authorities continued to intimidate and harass Afghans living in Pakistan. Undocumented Afghans remained vulnerable to abuse by police and district administrations and faced difficulties in accessing employment and education.

Economic and Social Rights

In 2023, depreciating local currency, skyrocketing inflation, and the removal of subsidies for electricity and fuel without adequate compensatory measures made it difficult for many people in

Pakistan to realize their economic and social rights. Pakistan's central bank's foreign exchange reserves decreased to a historic low of US\$3 billion in January, an amount covering fewer [than three weeks of imports](#). In July, Pakistan reached an agreement with the IMF for \$3 billion that mandated the government remove energy and fuel subsidies, move to a market-based exchange rate, and increase taxes. This resulted in widespread protests against higher electricity bills, inflation, and food shortages.

The economic crisis came amid the devastating economic cost of the 2022 floods.

[Nearly 37 percent](#) of Pakistan's 230 million people faced food insecurity as of 2018, yet only 8.9 million families received assistance to mitigate the impact of rampant inflation.

Following the release of a Human Rights Watch report [documenting the barriers to accessing health care](#) in Pakistani prisons, including for prisoners with disabilities, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered measures to improve sanitation and access to health care in Lahore central prison, including a dedicated hospital. He also vowed to initiate prison reforms throughout the country.

According to the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment, statistics show that [rates of sexual harassment at work have increased](#), with women disproportionately impacted. Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment at work, the government has not ratified the International Labour Organization Violence and Harassment Convention (C190), which requires comprehensive protections to end violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, at work.

Key International Actors

In July, the European Union [proposed extending Pakistan's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus \(GSP+\)](#) status by another four years, enabling Pakistan to enjoy trade preferences and access to the European market.

In July, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto met, [noting "positive momentum"](#) in Pakistani-US relations and agreeing to remain "constructively engaged to promote peace, security and development."

Also in July, Human Rights Watch [urged Pakistan](#) to make a submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legal consequences of Israel's prolonged occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In August, Pakistan [made a formal submission](#) on the subject to the ICJ.

Pakistan and China [deepened](#) their extensive economic and political ties in 2023, and work continued on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a project consisting of the construction of roads, railways, and energy pipelines.