



# Monthly Report Pakistan

*December*



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## Introduction

This report intends to provide a brief but an informative overview of how the current affairs have impacted marginalised and vulnerable groups within Pakistan, with a focus on the events transpired in the month of December 2022.

To comprehend the circumstances in which these scenarios have occurred, a brief country profile will be provided prior to the reports of the events of December 2022. This will be followed by a section focused on events affecting women's rights and children's rights in Pakistan, as well as a section on how religious minorities have been affected. Given the recent events between the Taliban and other Pakistani groups, the security developments of the month of December will also be discussed. Finally, this report will list the positive developments which took place in the past month, and how these affected vulnerable groups.

Moreover, as the events are categorised in accordance to the disadvantaged groups they have affected, underrepresented groups will be highlighted and, by making readers aware of such issues.

## Country Profile

Pakistan, officially known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, has a population of over 228 million people as of 2022, making it the world's fifth most populous country (One World Nations Online, n.d.). This population is a Muslim majority, with 96 percent of its population belonging to the Islamic faith. This is relevant to its political system, as Islam is the State religion and Islamic law largely influences Pakistan's current legal system (One World Nations Online, n.d.). Such influence is exemplified by Pakistan's major political parties within the multi-party system of its bicameral parliament as these are the Pakistan People's Party, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Tehreek-e-Insaf (CIA, 2022). Nonetheless, the Constitution ensures religious freedom, and a small percentage of the population is Hindu, Christian, or Buddhist, in addition to tribal or indigenous persons' distinct religious identities.

As a federal state, occupying an area of 796,095 km<sup>2</sup>, each of Pakistan's four provinces enjoys a wide array of legislative autonomy and has its own regional governments. The provinces are Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There are two additional administered areas: Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, as well as the Islamabad Capital Territory (CIA, 2022).

Pakistan has continuously faced conflict, starting in 1947 following its partition from modern-day India, and the conflict resulting in the creation of modern-day Bangladesh (One World Nations Online, n.d.).

The country also continued to face internal conflicts, as seen from the attacks that civilians and state actors have faced from militant groups who managed to gain control, such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa until 2009 (One World Nations Online, n.d.). Recently, there has been a resurgence of the TTP throughout Pakistan, as well as the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban.

## Women's Rights

### Karachi – Pakistan

The year 2022 demonstrated a disturbing rise of over 200 sexual abuse cases in the city of Karachi. According to the Karachi police statistics, as provided by Gender News Pakistan, “in eight of the 216 abuse cases, the victims were aged until five years, 40 were aged between six and ten, 38 between 15 and 18, and 95 over 18” (Admin, 2022). Amongst further investigation by the Karachi-based non-governmental organisation War Against Rape (WAR), up until the month of July, 42 cases were investigated, 27 of which involved survivors under the age of 18. Furthermore, 36 percent of those cases involved victims aged five to eleven, with this age group having been deemed the most vulnerable group. 29 percent of the cases reported involved victims aged 12 to 17. Regarding the nature of the assaults documented, “64 percent of the cases were of rape, 18 percent of gang rape, 12 percent of incest and six percent of sexual assault” (Admin, 2022). In reaction to these instances of sexual assault, WAR programme officer Sheraz Ahmed made the following statement:

[F]irst of all, the government should adopt and expand life skills-based education, also known as comprehensive sexuality education, across Pakistan [...] You can't trust anyone. Close relatives are also found involved in some of these cases (Ahmed, 2022).

Ahmed has openly stated his discontent with the government's strategy by making references to the Zainab Alert, an app that attempts to quickly and effectively report missing children. Ahmed's discontent has been attributed to the government's dismissal of documented incidents, as police officers seem to not take missing persons cases seriously.

In the month of December, several alarming instances of sexual assault on young girls have been reported in Karachi. On December 6th, the body of a 12-year-old girl was discovered near the Jacob Lines Area. Even though the case was initially classified as a suicide, subsequent police investigation and medical discoveries later suggested that the young girl had been victim of sexual assault and died from asphyxia, as a result of strangulation. The young girl's uncle was later apprehended and charged with the crime. A similar crime occurred on December 8<sup>th</sup> when a 14-year-old girl was murdered by the plumber working in her house. The child was apparently raped and strangled by the perpetrator, as she fled to the Gulshan-e-Iqbal neighbourhood. Furthermore, on December 13th, a six-year-old Afghan girl went missing from outside her home; her body was later discovered at a derelict residence close to the Gulshan-e-Maymar Afghan camp police checkpoint, where she was found to have been raped and killed. Police later arrested the 18-year-old suspect Yousef after neighbours said “(h) e was standing [there] when the children were playing and he took the girl with him toward a dark area” stated police officer Amin Qureshi (Qureshi, 2022).

Moreover, three men were detained by the Defence Housing Authority, following their alleged involvement in gang rape of a teenage girl on December 14th. After being questioned by the police, the suspects admitted that they had abducted a girl from Nazimabad, aged between 18 and 19 and that they had sexually assaulted her, after giving her sedatives (Ali, 2022).

## Children's Rights

### Child Labour

At the beginning of December 2022, the National Commission on the Right of Child (NCRC), in collaboration with UNICEF, formally launched its policy brief and survey on child labour highlighting the national and international commitments, as well as the gaps in the implementation and enforcement of such commitments (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022).

The policy brief assessed the issue of child domestic labour from a legal perspective, specifically focusing on prevailing laws and enforcement mechanisms (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022). Furthermore, the policy brief provides recommendations to legislators, policymakers, government agencies and development practitioners for tackling the issue of child domestic labour (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022).

The NCRC Chairperson Afshan Tehseen particularly stressed the need to address loopholes in the existing laws on child domestic labour at the federal and provincial levels. Afshan Tehseen emphasised that many laws regarding child labour still lacked implementation and specific rules (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022).

The NCRC welcomed the enactment of the Islamabad Capital Territory Domestic Workers Act in October 2022, in compliance with Article 25(A) of the Pakistani Constitution, thereby prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 16 within the Islamabad Capital Territory (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022). The findings of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices survey on child labour and violent discipline were shared by the chief of Child Protection at UNICEF, Danial Luciani (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022). Ms Luciani stated that nearly 16 per cent of the child population was known to be involved in child labour with 13 to 14 percent of them being aged five to 17 (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022). Furthermore, she explained that child labour knowingly carries harmful consequences, such as sexual abuse, exploitation, and physical abuse (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022). Addressing the issue of violent discipline, Ms Luciani stated 81 percent of children in Punjab, 80 percent of children in Sindh and 82 percent of children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had experienced some sort of violence (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022).

In response to the policy brief and survey, the Joint Secretary of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Mohammad Wishaq, and Senator Rubina Khalid mentioned the importance of raising awareness and the role and efforts of the ministry to eliminate child labour (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2022).

### Rights and protection of transgender children

On December 15th, 2022, the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) directed the Ministry of Human Rights to constitute a child protection unit for transgender children to ensure due rights to them (Bhatti, 2022). Particularly, a two-member bench of the FSC, comprising Chief Justice Dr Syed Muhammed Anwer



and Justice Khadim Hussain Shaikh issued the directive while hearing multiple petitions challenging the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 (Bhatti, 2022). During the hearing, the FSC bench noted that the Human Rights Ministry did not appear sincere in allocating the provisions of rights to transgender children (Bhatti, 2022). The case specifically concerned a set of petitioners who challenged the Transgender Act in 2021 on grounds that it was “repugnant to Islamic injunctions” and a set of newly filed petitions against the law in September 2022 (Bhatti, 2022).

Chief Justice Anwer emphasised the widespread issue of families abandoning their transgender children who then often become victims of exploitation by criminals (Ali, 2022). Furthermore, the Chief Justice pointed out Section 6(a) of the Transgender Act obliging the government and the Human Rights Ministry to ensure the rescue, protection and rehabilitation of transgender persons and to provide medical, psychological, and counselling facilities (Ali, 2022). Specifically, the Chief Justice emphasised that there should be protection homes for intersex children who were abandoned by their families as well as older persons under the category of intersex (Ali, 2022).

Ultimately, the FSC formed a special committee to devise the standard operating procedures of the special unit concerned with the protection of transgender children and provide a report to the FSC within the next 24 days (Bhatti, 2022). The hearing was adjourned until January 10th, 2023 (Bhatti, 2022).

## Religious & Gender Minorities

The body of Daya Bheel was found mutilated in a field in the Southeastern Sindh Province on Thursday 29th December (Mogul et al., 2022). This attack epitomises the far broader issue of gender and religiously motivated attacks in Pakistan, especially against Hindu women. The son of the victim had alleged that she had gone to collect grass on December, Wednesday 28th, when she was reported missing. The Women's Democratic Front (WDF) has issued statements on the case noting that they were rendered "extremely disturbed, saddened and shocked" (Mogul et al., 2022). The group has underlined a "deafening silence in the power corridors and in the mainstream media" with regards to the treatment of women, especially women of religious minority status in the country. The Sindh Police have since assembled a specialised team for the case, making a number of arrests, although they did not share any details. The motive for the murder has been stated as undetermined.

In the city of Gujranwala, Punjab Province, the religious minority of Ahmadis was pulled once again into public view, as the minarets of their mosque were demolished by local police on the 8th of December (Introvigne, 2022). In order to complete the demolition, the police were reported as having blocked off the road before beginning the raid. The sect, deemed as non-Muslims by many due to their rejection of the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed, were ordered to remove "Islamic symbols" from their mosque (Butt, 2022). Consequently, parts of the mosque were covered by sheets of metal to obscure them from view, but it was not enough to prevent targeting. This stems from a history of systematic persecution from the government, which can lead to life imprisonment in the most extreme scenarios. The police have stated that the demolition occurred with permission of the local Ahmadis, and that this was to prevent incitation of violence by religious groups who had previously complained about the mosque (Butt, 2022).

## Security Developments

Following the abandonment of the TTP ceasefire in late November 2022, the Pakistani Taliban have increased both the quantity and ferocity of their attacks. Alongside this, The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has also continued their efforts amidst prolonged relative deprivation and lack of effective political representation.

The first act of violence consisted of the bombing of a bazaar's bakery in Quetta, Balochistan, on December 10th, which caused one person's death and six others injured (AP News, 2022a). The BLA have been suspected of carrying out the attack, although the group has yet to claim responsibility. Later, on December 14th, a roadside bomb in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province resulted in the mortal injury of one soldier and one civilian death, as well as approximately 14 injuries (AP News, 2022b). With the bombing being left unclaimed, Pakistani authorities have assumed TTP responsibility for the attack. However, just five days later, the Pakistani Army suffered further casualties as another explosion took the lives of a soldier and two more civilians in the same province (Xinhua, 2022). The attack was reported to be a suicide attack, once again pointing towards a higher likelihood of TTP origin. The only residential attack to be asserted so far by the Taliban was the car bombing in Islamabad on Friday 23rd of December (AP News, 2022c). The attack claimed the lives of both militants involved and one police officer, while also injuring three other officers and several civilians.

The acts above underline that, although the ceasefire was weak and punctuated with minor infractions, the call-off has resulted in a phenomenal upscaling in the TTP's armed campaign. However, one of the more audacious attacks occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, on the 15th of December, as TTP fighters seized a counterterrorism centre in Bannu district, taking several members of the armed forces hostage (Al Jazeera, 2022b). During the attack, weapons were taken from the centre to be used by the terrorist organisation. The siege came to an end on the 20th, as special forces commandos retook the complex (BBC News, 2022). Two special forces members were killed, along with all 33 Taliban members involved. The event was an outstanding demonstration of the renewed viciousness of the TTP, attributable to the "total collapse" of the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government according to Pakistani Defense Minister, Muhammed Asif (BBC News, 2022).

In addition to the slew of attacks by armed groups, there has been increased tension with the neighbouring Afghan Taliban, following flare-ups at the Chaman border crossing. On December 11th, Afghan Armed Forces reportedly opened "unprovoked and indiscriminate fire" onto a crowd of civilians (Al Jazeera, 2022a). Of those hit, twenty-seven were injured, with six confirmed mortalities. The Pakistani Army allegedly became involved, killing one Afghan soldier. The Pakistani and Afghani governments held an emergency meeting, causing both parties to agree to stop hostilities.

The final noteworthy development that occurred was the unveiling of the Taliban’s parallel government on December 31st. The TTP “announced its new appointments dividing the outfit into various ministries, Defence, Judiciary, Information, Political Affairs, Economic Affairs, Education, a fatwa issuing authority, Intelligence and a department for construction,” (OpIndia, 2023). There is a potential indication of future expansion of TTP attacks and controlled territories, as with the creation of a squadron of suicide bombers called the ‘Special Istishadi Force’. This concludes 2022 as an especially crucial year for the Taliban, with not only a nascent government cabinet but a grand total of 148 attacks by the group on government defence establishments alone.

## Positive Developments

### Gender Minorities

The 56th board meeting of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) approved the inclusion of the transgender community as beneficiaries of the Benazir Kafalat Programme (BKP) (Staff Report, 2022a). In this occasion, BISP Chairman Shazia Marri referred to the transgender policy, as a “landmark achievement” and urged the board members to use their “good offices and influence” to mobilise the marginalised community, so that the maximum number of transgender persons could benefit from the policy (Staff Report, 2022a). The members of the transgender community registered themselves with BKP, adding that they would receive Rs 7,000 upon successful registration (Staff Report, 2022a).

### Religious Minorities

December 2022 has seen positive developments in religious minorities’ protection. Despite the continued threat of terrorist attacks, Christian communities across Pakistan celebrated Christmas Sunday in much the usual way: prayers were offered for peace, progress, and prosperity of Pakistan as well as for the safety of all humanity (Mughal, 2022). The faithful took part in traditional Yuletide activities, including illuminating houses and neighbourhoods, and came to church prepared by their leaders to expect bodily searches from security personnel (Mughal, 2022).

Within the last weeks of December 2022, Pakistani law enforcement agencies visited churches to implement comprehensive security arrangements for prayer services and other religious activities on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Over 1,500 policemen were deployed around churches in the capital to ensure high security during prayer services (Mughal, 2022). In Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, near the Afghanistan border, Pakistan army personnel also set up posts in volatile areas (Mughal, 2022).

According to Amir Rufin, a Catholic from Lahore, the Christian community had a peaceful Christmas, thanks to the local administration, security agencies, and the police providing security keeping (Mughal, 2022). President Dr. Arif Alvi also extended his felicitations and warmest wishes to the Christian community. During their Christmas messages, many Muslim political leaders lauded the contribution of Pakistani Christians in service to the country and assured these communities that Christians are an integral part of the Pakistani nation (Mughal, 2022).

### Women’s Rights

In the attempt to prevent sexual violence against women and children, the Sindh government has approved the important step to establish 27 Anti-Rape Crisis Cells across the province. According to the official notification, cells will remain operational round the clock, on the lines of the medico-legal department and will provide overall support to men, women, children, and transgender people (Abbasi, 2022). The first cell will be set up in the Police Surgeon Office Karachi as a pilot project. In this regard, police Surgeon Dr. Samia declared to the Express Tribune that the cell would serve to provide medico-legal certificates, psychological support, and legal services to sexual abuse victims (Abbasi, 2022).

Moreover, far from constituting a stand alone initiative, a second cell will be set up at Jinnah Hospital Karachi in March 2023, and another one will also be inaugurated in the police surgeon's office soon under the Anti-Rape Investigation and Trial Act 2021, according to Dr. Samia (Abassi, 2022) .

## **Climate Change**

On December 4th, 2022, the KP government reportedly inserted "Climate Change" in the title of Environment Department to reflect its focus and priority in handling issues pertaining to environmental degradation caused by climatic changes (Staff Report, 2022b). In addition, a notification issued by the KP government stated that the a prefix of "Climate Change" has been added to the title of Forestry, Environment and Wildlife Department (Staff Report, 2022b).

The Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Abdul Qadir Patel distributed cheques worth Rs 250 million among frontline Polio workers, whose homes were either washed away in the floods or partially damaged (Staff Report, 2022c). Addressing the occasion, the minister said that the government is grateful for the services of polio workers, who despite suffering losses in the catastrophic floods continued to assist with flood relief activities (Staff Report, 2022c).

The Pakistan Polio Programme conducted a comprehensive assessment of the damages that polio workers suffered this summer when unprecedented rains and flooding affected 33 million people and left a third of the country under water (Staff Report, 2022c). According to the National Emergency Operations Center Coordinator, the first priority is always polio workers. There are over 350,000 frontline staff and we conducted an extensive exercise in all provinces to assess the impact of the floods (Staff Report, 2022c). Nearly 12,500 polio health workers were affected by the floods, according to the polio programme's assessment, with a majority of them in Sindh and Balochistan (Staff Report, 2022c). The government will be distributing cheques worth nearly Rs 250 million to polio health workers around the country.

## **Looking Forward**

In future research, we will continue to pay attention to various human rights issues in Pakistani society, and will continue to focus on the protection of women's rights, freedom of religion , national security and terrorist activities in Pakistan.

Although it is already winter, the remaining issues of the flood disaster in Pakistan have not been properly resolved yet, especially in terms of the subsidies and compensation for affected families and infrastructure reconstruction. In fact, if housing and basic living supplies cannot be provided in time for the affected population, it will be very difficult for them to survive in the coming months. The recent national security issues in Pakistan are increasingly worrying, and the activities of terrorist organisations are gradually increasing. Following the abandonment of the TTP ceasefire in late November 2022, the Pakistani Taliban have increased both the quantity and ferocity of their attacks. The Pakistani government should act as soon as possible to curb the spread of terrorist activities and ensure the personal safety and normal life of local residents.

In addition to topics surrounding the rights of women and children, the protection of religious and sexual minorities will also be included in our future research. Despite some positive developments on these issues, violation of rights of women, the LGBTQ+ community and religious minorities still persist. Although the government has repeatedly advocated the protection of their rights, specific policies have scarcely been implemented, with effect has been achieved.

## Conclusion

This report aimed to provide insights into how different vulnerable and minority groups within Pakistan have been affected by the developments of December 2022. The issue of the rise of sexual abuse cases in Karachi, including violence against minors, poses a threat to women's rights. Children's rights have been affected by the ongoing use of child labour in Pakistan, as demonstrated by the joint policy brief and survey conducted by the NCRC and UNICEF. Moreover, transgender children have also faced human rights abuses, with the Federal Shariat Court directing the Ministry of Human Rights to create a child protection unit for these children, as well as forming a special committee to devise standard operating procedures of this special unit. Religious minorities continue to face rights violations, as exemplified by a Hindu woman, Daya Bheel, having been mutilated in Sindh and police action only having been taken after public and mediatic backlash. The Ahmadis' were also victims of a brutal attack after local police demolished the minarets of their mosques, even after enduring continuous systematic persecution.

This report extended its scope to include security developments in Pakistan in December 2022. The TTP, which in recent months regained prominence throughout Pakistan, was attributed a suicide attack on the Pakistani Army, seized a counterterrorism centre, and created ministries in an attempt to undermine the Pakistani government. The Balochistan Liberation Army was attributed with a bomb attack on a bakery, and the tensions with the Afghan Taliban have increased as the group has gained control in neighbouring Afghanistan once again.

Lastly, the report discussed a series of positive developments for different vulnerable groups. These developments include the transgender community being included as beneficiaries of the Benazir Kafalat Programme, Pakistani Christians being able to have Christmas celebrations after security preparations were effectively put in place, the Sindh government having approved the establishment of 27 Anti-Rape Crisis Cells which will provide medical and legal support to victims of sexual assault, and economic relief was granted to several affected by the recent floods.



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