



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence

Version 6.0

October 2025

Executive summary

Pakistan is a large and diverse country where women face a range of challenges despite constitutional guarantees of equality and the existence of laws aimed at protecting their rights. Social, cultural, and economic factors contribute to limitations on women's autonomy and access to justice, particularly in rural and conservative areas.

Women in Pakistan are considered to form a Particular Social Group (PSG) under the Refugee Convention.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is reported across the country and includes domestic violence, honour-based practices, early and forced marriage, and sexual violence. While legal frameworks exist to address these issues, enforcement is inconsistent and access to justice may be limited by societal attitudes, procedural barriers, and resource constraints.

A person who fears a non-state actor, including a rogue state-actor, is likely to obtain protection from the state.

The Pakistani state has taken steps to provide protection through specialised police units, gender-based violence courts, and shelter facilities. However, the effectiveness of these measures varies, and some facilities have operational limitations. Survivors may encounter obstacles in accessing support services, and outcomes can depend on individual circumstances.

Internal relocation is likely to be reasonable for a woman with family support or a male guardian, or with the financial means to support themselves, to large urban centres such as, but not limited to, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad.

Internal relocation for a woman without such support networks or resources will be more difficult, though still may be reasonable. Each case must be considered on its facts.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certified as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

[Back to Contents](#)

Contents

Executive summary	2
Assessment	5
About the assessment	5
1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals	5
1.1 Credibility	5
1.2 Exclusion	6
2. Convention reason(s)	6
3. Risk	7
4. Protection	9
5. Internal relocation	10
6. Certification	12
Country information	13
About the country information	13
7. Legal context	13
7.1 Constitutional rights	13
7.2 Legislation protecting women's rights	13
7.3 Marriage and divorce laws	14
8. Socio-economic indicators	16
8.1 Gender equality	16
8.2 Education and literacy	16
8.3 Employment and income	17
8.4 Political participation and representation	18
8.5 Healthcare and reproductive rights	19
9. Position of women in society	21
9.1 Demography	21
9.2 Cultural and societal attitudes	21
9.3 Single women	23
9.4 Love marriage	24
9.5 Lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) women	25
9.6 Freedom of movement	25
10. Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls	26
10.1 Prevalence of GBV	26
10.2 Domestic violence	28
10.3 'Honour' crimes	29
10.4 Early and forced marriage	31
10.5 Sexual violence	34

11. Relationships and children outside of marriage	35
11.1 Legal context	35
11.2 Presumption of marriage for unmarried couples	35
11.3 Children born outside marriage	36
12. State treatment and attitudes	37
12.1 Implementation and enforcement of laws protecting women	37
12.2 Access to justice	39
12.3 Prosecutions and convictions	41
12.4 Informal justice systems	43
12.5 Legal aid	44
13. Assistance available to women	45
13.1 Shelters and crisis centres	45
Research methodology	49
Terms of Reference	50
Bibliography	51
Sources cited	51
Sources consulted but not cited	55
Version control and feedback	57
Feedback to the Home Office	57
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information	57

Assessment

Section updated: 22 October 2025

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of **whether, in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by non-state actors because the person is a women
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

[Back to Contents](#)

1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#), and [Gender identity issues in the asylum claim](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when one has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

[Back to Contents](#)

1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed particular social group (PSG).
- 2.1.2 Women form a PSG in Pakistan within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share an innate characteristic or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it **and** have a distinct identity in Pakistan because the group is perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.1.3 In [Shah and Islam HL \[1999\] ImmAR283](#), promulgated 25 March 1999, the House of Lords held that women in Pakistan constituted a particular social group because they share the common immutable characteristic of gender, they were discriminated against as a group in matters of fundamental human rights and the State gave them no adequate protection because they were perceived as not being entitled to the same human rights as men.
- 2.1.4 While the Constitution provides for equality of all citizens and numerous laws have been enacted to protect women's rights, deep-rooted social, cultural and economic barriers and prejudices remain, indicating that women continue to meet the definition of a PSG.
- 2.1.5 Although women form a PSG, establishing such membership is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their membership of such a group.
- 2.1.6 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3. Risk

- 3.1.1 Women in Pakistan are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 Gender-based violence, although widespread in Pakistan particularly in a domestic context, contains a wide spectrum of behaviour, much of which is not likely to be sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to reach the high threshold of persecution or serious harm.
- 3.1.3 Some women may be at more risk of persecution or serious harm, including those who are seen to have transgressed social, cultural or religious norms which have brought dishonour on the family. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 3.1.4 Women face limitations in various aspects of life due to structural, cultural, and societal norms. Patriarchal attitudes influence decision-making, mobility, and access to education, employment, and healthcare. In many cases, women rely on male family members for key life decisions. These constraints are more pronounced in rural areas. Public participation by women, including activism and journalism, may attract negative attention. While some women hold senior roles in public life, their experiences are not representative (see [Cultural and societal attitudes](#)).
- 3.1.5 Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls is widespread in Pakistan, including murder, 'honour' crimes, rape, kidnapping (which may lead to early or forced marriage), and domestic violence. The UN and national bodies report high rates of GBV, but actual figures are likely higher due to significant underreporting due to stigma and, in the context of domestic violence, the view that it is a 'private' matter. Reported cases in 2024 include 547 'honour' killings, 5,339 rapes, 24,493 abductions, and 2,238 incidents of domestic violence. Punjab has the highest numbers, but rates per 100,000 women are also high in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Islamabad (see [Gender-based violence \(GBV\) against women and girls](#)).
- 3.1.6 Domestic violence is widespread, affecting women in both rural and urban areas. It includes physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and psychological abuse. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2017 to 2018), 23% of ever-married women aged 15 to 49 reported physical violence, 26% emotional, and 5% sexual violence by husbands or intimate partners. In 2024, police data show domestic violence accounted for at least 1,641 murders and 3,385 cases of beating. Most perpetrators are husbands (70%), followed by fathers, brothers and in-laws (see [Domestic violence](#)).
- 3.1.7 Honour crimes in Pakistan encompass a range of harmful practices – domestic abuse, threats, forced marriage, acid attacks, and killings – carried out to preserve family 'honour'. Common triggers include a woman's choice of clothing, employment, education, refusal of arranged marriage, marrying without family consent, seeking divorce, being raped, or having relationships outside marriage. The concept is rooted in patriarchal norms, especially in rural and tribal areas, where family reputation is seen as paramount and women's actions are closely controlled. Honour killings are reported

nationwide, with Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa showing the highest numbers in 2024. Most victims are women, though men can also be targeted (see [‘Honour’ crimes](#)).

- 3.1.8 Jirgas are informal tribal councils, mainly in Pashtun areas, which follow traditional Pashtunwali codes and Islamic law. Though not legally binding, their decisions carry strong social pressure and are widely followed. Reports highlight that jirgas often lack legal protections and can result in human rights abuses, especially against women, including violent punishments and forced marriages. They are sometimes supported by local authorities and used for swift justice. However, their influence is declining, particularly among youth and urban populations. Women are excluded from participation, even when directly involved in cases (see [Informal justice systems](#)).
- 3.1.9 A woman accused of adultery (zina) may face prosecution. However, due to high evidential standards, securing convictions are described as ‘nearly impossible’ (see [Relationships and children outside of marriage](#)).
- 3.1.10 In the country guidance (CG) case of [SM \(lone women - ostracism\) \(CG\) \[2016\] UKUT 67 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 21 May 2015 and promulgated 2 February 2016, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that the existing CG in [KA and Others \(domestic violence risk on return\) Pakistan CG \[2010\] UKUT 216 \(IAC\)](#), heard 21 and 22 April 2010, and promulgated 14 July 2010, remains valid (paragraph 73i).
- 3.1.11 In [KA and Others](#), which considered the case of a woman whose husband had filed charges of adultery against her, the UT held that ‘In general persons who on return face prosecution in the Pakistan courts will not be at real risk of a flagrant denial of their right to a fair trial, although it will always be necessary to consider the particular circumstances of the individual case’ (headnote paragraph i).
- 3.1.12 In [KA and Others](#) the UT held that:

‘The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act 2006 (“PWA”), one of a number of legislative measures undertaken to improve the situation of women in Pakistan in the past decade, has had a significant effect on the operation of the Pakistan criminal law as it affects women accused of adultery. It led to the release of 2,500 imprisoned women. Most sexual offences now have to be dealt with under the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) rather than under the more punitive Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance 1979. Husbands no longer have power to register a First Information Report (FIR) with the police alleging adultery; since 1 December 2006 any such complaint must be presented to a court which will require sufficient grounds to be shown for any charges to proceed. A senior police officer has to conduct the investigation. Offences of adultery (both zina liable to hadd and zina liable to tazir) have been made bailable ...’ (headnote iii).
- 3.1.13 The UT held in [SM \(lone women - ostracism\)](#) that ‘Women in Pakistan are legally permitted to divorce their husbands and may institute divorce proceedings from the country of refuge, via a third party and with the help of lawyers in Pakistan, reducing the risk of family reprisals. A woman who does so and returns with a new partner or husband will have access to male protection and is unlikely, outside her home area, to be at risk of ostracism, still less of persecution or serious harm’ (paragraph 73 viii).

- 3.1.14 In [KA and Others](#) the UT held that ‘Whether a woman on return faces a real risk of an honour killing will depend on the particular circumstances; however, in general such a risk is likely to be confined to tribal areas such as the North West Frontier Province [now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – KP] and is unlikely to impact on married women’ (headnote paragraph iv).
- 3.1.15 More recent country information indicates that the risk of ‘honour’ killing is not restricted to tribal areas or unmarried women, however its prevalence is difficult to quantify as available statistics vary and crimes may be underreported.
- 3.1.16 The country information in this note does not indicate that there are ‘very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence’ to justify a departure from the country guidance findings.
- 3.1.17 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

4. Protection

- 4.1.1 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state actor, including a rogue state-actor, is likely to obtain protection from the state.
- 4.1.2 In general, Pakistan takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection. For further guidance on state protection in general, see the [Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).
- 4.1.3 The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and there is a wide range of legislation aimed at protecting the rights of women. Pakistan has established women-friendly police helpdesks, Gender Protection Units, and special Gender-Based Violence (GBV) courts in all provinces. There are also crisis centres, helplines, and shelters for women survivors. However, the criminal justice system faces major challenges: entrenched patriarchal norms, limited awareness, weak law enforcement, and systemic obstacles result in low reporting, prosecution, and conviction rates for GBV crimes. Implementation of protective laws is inconsistent, and survivors may face stigma, victim blaming, or pressure to remain silent (see [Access to justice](#)).
- 4.1.4 Pakistan operates various shelter homes (Dar ul Amans), women’s crisis centres, and safe houses at federal and provincial levels. In Punjab, every district has a Dar ul Aman, and Multan hosts a 24/7 Violence Against Women Centre offering integrated support. However, shelters are often overcrowded, under-resourced, and sometimes lack basic facilities like showers or hygiene products. Many government-run shelters restrict women’s movement, require court orders for entry and exit, and may pressure women to return to their abusers. There is a lack of safe transitional housing, putting women at risk of further violence after leaving shelters. Private and NGO-run shelters exist but struggle to meet demand and face financial constraints (see [Shelters and crisis centres](#)).
- 4.1.5 In [KA and Others](#) the UT held that ‘The network of women’s shelters (comprising government-run shelters (Darul Amans) and private and Islamic

women's crisis centres) in general affords effective protection for women victims of domestic violence, although there are significant shortcomings in the level of services and treatment of inmates in some such centres. Women with boys over 5 face separation from their sons' (headnote paragraph vi).

4.1.6 In [SM \(lone women - ostracism\)](#), the UT held that:

'A single woman or female head of household who has no male protector or social network may be able to use the state domestic violence shelters for a short time, but the focus of such shelters is on reconciling people with their family networks, and places are in short supply and time limited. Privately run shelters may be more flexible, providing longer term support while the woman regularises her social situation, but again, places are limited.

'Domestic violence shelters are available for women at risk but where they are used by women with children, such shelters do not always allow older children to enter and stay with their mothers. The risk of temporary separation, and the proportionality of such separation, is likely to differ depending on the age and sex of a woman's children: male children may be removed from their mothers at the age of 5 and placed in an orphanage or a madrasa until the family situation has been regularised (see [KA and Others...](#)). Such temporary separation will not always be disproportionate or unduly harsh: that is a question of fact in each case' (paragraph 73 vi to vii).

4.1.7 More recent country information indicates that male children under age 12 can access some shelters with their mothers (see [Shelters and crisis centres](#)).

4.1.8 The country information in this note does not indicate that there are 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to justify a departure from the country guidance findings.

4.1.9 In general, the state is both willing and able to offer sufficient protection to persons fearing non-state, including 'rogue' state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

4.1.10 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

5. Internal relocation

5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor, internal relocation is likely be reasonable for a woman with family support or a male guardian, or with the financial means to support themselves, to large urban centres such as, but not limited to, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad.

5.1.2 Internal relocation for a woman without such support networks or resources will be more difficult, though still may be reasonable. Each case must be considered on its facts.

5.1.3 Pakistan is a large and diverse country with a population of over 141 million, nearly half of whom are women. The law protects the right to freedom of movement, which is generally respected by the government, and internal migration is common. There are state-run shelters in all major cities (see [Demography](#), [Freedom of movement](#) and [Shelters and crisis centres](#)).

- 5.1.4 In [SM \(lone women - ostracism\)](#) the UT held that the existing CG in [SN and HM \(Divorced women – risk on return\) Pakistan CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00283](#), heard 19 April 2004 and promulgated 25 May 2004, and in [KA and Others](#), remains valid.
- 5.1.5 In [SN and HM \(Divorced women – risk on return\)](#) the UT held that the question of internal flight will require careful consideration in each case. The UT held that ‘The general questions which [decision makers] should ask themselves in cases of this kind are as follows:
- (a) Has the claimant shown a real risk or reasonable likelihood of continuing hostility from her husband (or former husband) or his family members, such as to raise a real risk of serious harm in her former home area?
 - (b) If yes, has she shown that she would have no effective protection in her home area against such a risk, including protection available from the Pakistani state, from her own family members, or from a current partner or his family?
 - (c) If yes, would such a risk and lack of protection extend to any other part of Pakistan to which she could reasonably be expected to go ... having regard to the available state support, shelters, crisis centres, and family members or friends in other parts of Pakistan?’ (paragraph 48)
- 5.1.6 In [SM \(lone women - ostracism\)](#) the UT held that:
- ‘Where a risk of persecution or serious harm exists in her home area for a single woman or a female head of household, there may be an internal relocation option to one of Pakistan’s larger cities, depending on the family, social and educational situation of the woman in question.
- ‘It will not normally be unduly harsh to expect a single woman or female head of household to relocate internally within Pakistan if she can access support from family members or a male guardian in the place of relocation.
- ‘It will not normally be unduly harsh for educated, better off, or older women to seek internal relocation to a city. It helps if a woman has qualifications enabling her to get well-paid employment and pay for accommodation and childcare if required.
- ‘Where a single woman, with or without children, is ostracised by family members and other sources of possible social support because she is in an irregular situation, internal relocation will be more difficult and whether it is unduly harsh will be a question of fact in each case’ (paragraph 73 (ii to v).
- 5.1.7 In [KA and Others](#) the UT held that ‘In assessing whether women victims of domestic violence have a viable internal relocation alternative, regard must be had not only to the availability of such shelters/centres but also to the situation women will face after they leave such centres’ (headnote para vii).
- 5.1.8 The country information in this note does not indicate that there are ‘very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence’ to justify a departure from the country guidance findings.
- 5.1.9 For further guidance on internal relocation in general, see the [Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Internal relocation](#) and the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment which, as stated in the [About the assessment](#), is the guide to the current objective conditions.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before 31 August 2025. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

[Back to Contents](#)

7. Legal context

7.1 Constitutional rights

7.1.1 The Constitution provides for equality of citizens and states at Article 25:

(1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

(2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.

(3) Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children¹.

7.1.2 Article 34 directs the state to ensure women's full participation in all spheres of life, and Article 35 emphasises the state's responsibility to protect the family, mother and child². Articles 51 and 106 provide for the reservation of seats for women in the National Assembly, Senate, and Provincial Assemblies³.

[Back to Contents](#)

7.2 Legislation protecting women's rights

7.2.1 The Aurat Foundation (AF), a national women's rights NGO⁴, listed some 'Important Legislation' aimed at protecting women against various forms of violence, and ensuring rights relating to marriage, reproduction, property and employment, at the [federal level](#) and provincial level – [Punjab](#), [Sindh](#), [Balochistan](#) and [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#) – since 2002⁵.

7.2.2 The National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023 (NRSW 2023), developed in partnership between the Pakistan's National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and UN Women Pakistan,

¹ The Pakistan Code, [Constitution of Pakistan](#), (Article 25), 10 April 1973

² The Pakistan Code, [Constitution of Pakistan](#), (Articles 34 and 35), 10 April 1973

³ The Pakistan Code, [Constitution of Pakistan](#), (Articles 51 and 106), 10 April 1973

⁴ AF, [About AF](#), no date

⁵ AF, [Important Legislation](#), no date

also listed some of the main laws protecting women against violence and discrimination⁶, and added that ‘... Pakistan is party to seven international human rights treaties of which four comprehensively cover gender equality, namely UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights], CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women], CRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child] and SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] ...’⁷

See also [Implementation and enforcement of laws protecting women](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

7.3 Marriage and divorce laws

- 7.3.1 The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, which regulates marriage, polygamy, divorce and maintenance, states that ‘It extends to [the] whole of Pakistan, and applies to all Muslim citizens of Pakistan, wherever they may be.’⁸

See [Early and forced marriage](#) for related laws.

- 7.3.2 The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 regulates the grounds on which a woman may divorce her husband⁹. A woman can also file for a khula (woman’s right to divorce) at the family court, assuming she agrees to waive her dower (sum of money or property received by the bride from the groom)^{10 11}.
- 7.3.3 The 2023 International Religious Freedom (2023 USSD IRF) report noted that ‘Some court judgments have considered the marriage of a non-Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man dissolved if she converts to Islam, although the marriage of a non-Muslim man who converts remains recognized.’¹²
- 7.3.4 The 2023 USSD HR report noted that ‘The 2017 Hindu Marriage Law gave legal validity to Hindu marriages, including registration and official documentation, and outlined conditions for separation and divorce, including provisions for the financial security of wives and children.’¹³
- 7.3.5 The 2023 USSD IRF report noted that the provincial-level Sindh Hindu Marriage Act ‘... also applies to Sikh marriages’, and that ‘The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials in that province to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj (“Blissful Event,” or wedding ceremony) marriage registrar.’¹⁴ The 2024 USSD HR report stated that the Sikh Marriage Act 2024 was approved by the Punjab provincial government in June 2024 and, according to media reports, Sikhs from other provinces could travel to Punjab to register their marriages¹⁵.

⁶ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 83), June 2024

⁷ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 5), June 2024

⁸ The Pakistan Code, [Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961](#), 2 March 1961

⁹ The Pakistan Code, [Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939](#), 17 March 1939

¹⁰ Jurist Panel, [Divorce and Khula in Pakistan: Legal Process and Documentation](#), no date

¹¹ Tahir, R, [Supreme Court of Pakistan Holds that the Courts Cannot Pass a Decree ...](#), 22 April 2024

¹² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan](#) (section II), 26 June 2024

¹³ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

¹⁴ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan](#) (section II), 26 June 2024

¹⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3b), 12 August 2025

- 7.3.6 Christian marriages and divorces remained governed by the Christian Marriage Act of 1872 and the Christian Divorce Act of 1869. Grounds for divorce were limited and the Christian community called for both laws to be updated^{16 17}.
- 7.3.7 As reported by English news site, Dawn, in July 2024 President Asif Ali Zardari ‘... signed an amendment to the Christian Marriage Act, 1872, raising the minimum age of marriage for both males and females to 18 years.’¹⁸ The amendments applied only to the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) as religious and personal laws were devolved to the provinces^{19 20}.
- 7.3.8 The 2023 USSD HR report noted, similarly to their previous reports in 2021²¹ and 2022²², that:
- ‘Family law provided protection for women in cases of divorce, including requirements for maintenance, and set clear guidelines for custody of children and their maintenance. Many women were unaware of these legal protections or were unable to obtain legal counsel to enforce them. Divorced women often were left with no means of support, as their families ostracized them. Women were legally free to marry without family consent, but society frequently ostracized women who did so, or they risked becoming victims of so-called honor crimes.
- ‘The law entitled female children to one-half the inheritance of male children. Wives inherited one-eighth of their husbands’ estates. Women often received far less than their legal entitlement. In addition, complicated family disputes and the costs and time of lengthy court procedures reportedly discouraged women from pursuing legal challenges to inheritance discrimination. The Punjab Women’s Helpline received 2,134 complaints on problems concerning property and inheritance rights from January to August.’²³
- 7.3.9 All USSD reports on human rights practices for 2024, published on 12 August 2025, were reduced in size and scope compared to previous years’ reports²⁴ and information on family law was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report for Pakistan²⁵.
- 7.3.10 The April 2025 DFAT report cited examples of discriminatory marriage and divorce laws which, as well as the differences in legal marriage age for men and women, included:
- ‘... men being legally allowed seek a divorce at any time, while women cannot ... In-country sources told DFAT: women often received inequitable outcomes in family court, divorce cases frequently proceeded very slowly (except in Punjab, where divorce cases were regularly expedited), few pro bono lawyers were available; and men sometimes obstructed women’s

¹⁶ Express Tribune, [Christian women demand divorce rights](#), 14 October 2024

¹⁷ Express Tribune, [Christian Marriage Act: a milestone, not the destination](#), 22 December 2024

¹⁸ Dawn, [President Zardari signs amendment to Christian Marriage Act](#), 24 July 2024

¹⁹ Dawn, [President Zardari signs amendment to Christian Marriage Act](#), 24 July 2024

²⁰ National Assembly, [Christian Marriage \(Amendment\) Act 2024](#), 26 July 2024

²¹ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

²² USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

²³ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²⁴ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 August 2025

²⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

custody rights during the legal process. Women experience significant cultural stigma in relation to divorce, often seen as bringing shame on the family. Women face significant social pressure not to remarry but are also often threatened or abused by their husbands' and own families for their choice to divorce.'²⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

8. Socio-economic indicators

8.1 Gender equality

- 8.1.1 In the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index for 2025, Pakistan ranked last (148 out of 148 countries measured), in terms of women's economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment²⁷. Between 2014 and 2024 there was a minimal increase in the overall gender parity score. It rose from a score of 0.552 in 2014²⁸ to 0.570 in 2024²⁹. In 2025 it dropped slightly to 0.567³⁰.
- 8.1.2 Reporting on the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 on 13 June 2025, The Express Tribune, Pakistan's only internationally affiliated newspaper in a partnership with the International New York Times³¹, noted that, while limited progress had been made in educational attainment, there were declines in both the economic and political spheres³². Dawn reported on 15 June 2025 that the chairperson for the NCSW questioned the WEF report's methodology, which 'relied on perception surveys with limited sample sizes' and said the report's findings '... did not accurately reflect the country's progress on gender parity.'³³
- 8.1.3 The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index by the Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), ranks and scores 177 countries on women's status in terms of inclusion, justice and security³⁴. Pakistan ranked 158 out of 177 countries in the WPS Index 2023/24³⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.2 Education and literacy

- 8.2.1 A report on girls' education for 2022 to 2023, by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) and the Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE), noted that 'As of 2022-23, around 21 million girls are enrolled in educational institutes as compared to 25 million boys from pre-primary to degree stage ... Around 13.71 million girls remain out of schools [compared to 12.38 million boys³⁶] ... There are 238,718 educational institutions in Pakistan out

²⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.204), 30 April 2025

²⁷ WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#) (pages 13, 40 and 295), June 2025

²⁸ WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2014](#) (page 294), 2014

²⁹ WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#) (pages 12 and 289), June 2024

³⁰ WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#) (page 40), June 2025

³¹ Express Tribune, [About us](#), no date

³² Express Tribune, [Pakistan ranks last in Global Gender Gap Index 2025](#), 13 June 2025

³³ Dawn, [NCSW questions accuracy of Global Gender Gap report on Pakistan](#), 15 June 2025

³⁴ GIWPS, [Women Peace and Security Index 2023/24](#) (page 1), 2023

³⁵ GIWPS, [Women Peace and Security Index 2023/24](#) (page 85), 2023

³⁶ PIE/PAGE, [Girls Education in Pakistan: Statistics & Trends for 2022-23](#) (page 16), 2024

of which 97,509 [41%] are for boys and 65,683 [28%] for girls while 74,118 [31%] schools and colleges are co-education.³⁷

- 8.2.2 Like their previous reports in 2021³⁸ and 2022³⁹, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that:

‘The most significant barrier to girls’ education was lack of access. Public schools, particularly beyond the primary grades, were not available in many rural areas, and those that existed were often too far for a girl to travel unaccompanied under prevailing social norms. Despite cultural beliefs that boys and girls should be educated separately after primary school, the government often failed to take measures to provide separate restroom facilities or separate classrooms, and there were more government schools for boys than for girls. The attendance rates for girls in primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools were lower than for boys. Additionally, certain tribal and cultural beliefs often prevented girls from attending schools.’⁴⁰

- 8.2.3 Information on girls’ education was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report⁴¹.

- 8.2.4 According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Index for 2025, 48.5% of women were literate, 66.5% attended primary school, 37.4% attended high school, and 11% were enrolled in tertiary (higher) education, compared to 69.1%, 76.1%, 43.2% and 11.4% of men, respectively⁴². The WEF noted that parity in education had risen partly due to an increase in female literacy rates but also ‘... because male enrolment shares have dropped in tertiary education, increasing the relative balance between men and women ...’⁴³

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3 Employment and income

- 8.3.1 The Pakistan Government’s Bureau of Statistics (PBS) Labour Force Survey, 2020 to 2021, noted that male participation in the labour force for those considered working age (10 years and above) was three times that of women⁴⁴. As of June 2025, there was no Labour Force Survey since the 2020-21 annual report due to PBS engagement with the 7th national population census⁴⁵.

- 8.3.2 The NRSW 2023 noted that ‘In Pakistan, there has been a gradual albeit slow increase in women’s labor force participation. The increase has occurred more in the informal sector, while LFPR [labour force participation rate] in the formal sector has remained more or less stagnant over the past decade.’⁴⁶ The same report stated that the overall LFPR of women was 20%, compared to the global average of 39%⁴⁷. For women aged 15 to 64 years,

³⁷ PIE/PAGE, [Girls Education in Pakistan: Statistics & Trends for 2022-23](#) (page 5), 2024

³⁸ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

³⁹ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁴⁰ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

⁴¹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

⁴² WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#) (page 295), June 2025

⁴³ WEF, [Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#) (page 40), June 2025

⁴⁴ PBS, [Labour Force Survey 2020-21 \(Annual Report\)](#) (page 14), March 2022

⁴⁵ GoP Finance Division, [Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24](#) (Chapter 12, page 204), 2024

⁴⁶ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 30), June 2024

⁴⁷ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 31), June 2024

the LFPR was 26% compared to 84% for men⁴⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.4 Political participation and representation

8.4.1 As stated in their previous reports in 2021⁴⁹ and 2022⁵⁰, the 2023 USSD HR report similarly noted that:

‘Women’s political participation was affected by cultural barriers to voting and limited representation in policymaking and governance. Cultural and traditional barriers in tribal and rural areas impeded some women from voting.

‘Women participated actively as political party members, but they were often not successful in securing leadership positions within parties or positions in the decision-making bodies within parties apart from women’s wings. Of 87 members of the federal cabinet in the prior government led by Shehbaz Sharif including special advisors to the prime minister, only nine were women.’⁵¹

8.4.2 Information on women’s political participation was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report⁵².

8.4.3 The NRSW 2023 noted that:

‘The major factors hindering women’s participation in the political sphere, as members of the parliament, candidates, political workers, or voters include low levels of literacy; patriarchal mindset limiting their mobility, decision-making and advancement; financial constraints; lack of opportunities; barriers against participation in political/ leadership activities; lack of support from political parties and leadership; violence and harassment in the public and private spheres; and disproportionate share of responsibilities for the family and home.’⁵³

8.4.4 The Government of Pakistan (GoP) noted in their Second periodic report submitted to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), dated 22 June 2023, that:

‘There are 20 percent reserved seats for women in the Parliament and provincial assemblies. The current level of women’s representation in the national and provincial legislatures of Pakistan is amongst the highest in the region. Women in Pakistan serve at the highest positions of decision making. Women are members of the Cabinet; hold portfolio of Ministries, chairperson of NCHR [National Commission for Human Rights], General officers in the Army and hold other important decision-making positions.’⁵⁴

8.4.5 Regarding reserved seats for women, the GoP stated in their replies to issues related to its second periodic report, dated 21 March 2025, that there were ‘... 17 in the Senate, 60 in the National Assembly, and 132 in Provincial

⁴⁸ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan](#) (page 150, Table 2.2), June 2024

⁴⁹ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3), 12 April 2022

⁵⁰ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3), 20 March 2023

⁵¹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3), 22 April 2024

⁵² USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

⁵³ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 106), June 2024

⁵⁴ CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraph 50), 22 June 2023

Assemblies.’⁵⁵ The same report added, ‘The Elections Act of 2017 promotes women’s electoral engagement by invalidating results in constituencies with low female turnout and requiring political parties to nominate female candidates for 5% of non-reserved seats.’⁵⁶

- 8.4.6 Like their previous report in 2024⁵⁷, Freedom House stated in their Freedom in the World 2025 report, covering 2024 events, that:

‘The women’s branches of major political parties are active during elections, but women face practical restrictions on voting, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, where militant groups and societal constraints are stronger. Women rarely hold party or government leadership posts, and millions of women are missing from the voter rolls, partly because many lack identity documents. Electoral laws state that at least 10 percent of votes must be cast by women for a result to be valid.’⁵⁸

- 8.4.7 An opinion piece from June 2025 about women’s representation in parliament, in the English-language news site The News International, cited data from the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), stating that:

‘In 2024–25, women made up only 17 per cent of Pakistan’s parliament (69 out of 399 members), yet contributed nearly 49 per cent of the parliamentary agenda, the highest share recorded since 2015. In the National Assembly, women initiated 55 per cent of legislative items, and in the Senate, 31 per cent.

‘Their commitment outpaces that of their male peers. Female [Members of the National Assembly] MNAs averaged 17 agenda submissions each, more than five times the male average. They also showed higher engagement, attending 75 per cent of sittings compared to 63 per cent for male MNAs ...

‘And yet, these contributions often face institutional bottlenecks. The National Assembly addressed only 67 per cent of women-sponsored agenda items in 2024–25, a decline from 81 per cent in 2021–22. In the Senate, only 77 per cent of their agenda items were addressed, down from 94 per cent two years prior. While part of this reflects broader parliamentary inefficiencies, it also signals the limited priority assigned to women’s legislative efforts.’⁵⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

8.5 Healthcare and reproductive rights

- 8.5.1 The NRSW 2023 noted that:

‘The Lady Health Worker Programme, initiated in 1994 through Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s Programme for Family Planning and Primary Care, contributed significantly to taking trained healthcare to the doorsteps of the population. Its purpose is to ensure the provision of primary, preventative, promotive, and curative care services, mainly in marginalized remote rural and urban slum communities, particularly for women and children. Through almost 90,000 Lady Health Workers (LHWs), a population of approximately

⁵⁵ CESCR, [Replies of Pakistan to the list of issues in relation to its ...](#) (paragraph 49), 21 March 2025

⁵⁶ CESCR, [Replies of Pakistan to the list of issues in relation to its ...](#) (paragraph 49), 21 March 2025

⁵⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024: Pakistan](#) (B4), 2024

⁵⁸ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025: Pakistan](#) (B4), 2025

⁵⁹ News International, [Women in parliament](#), 24 June 2025

115 million women, men, and children who would otherwise lack access to health services are provided with Primary Health Care (PHC).⁶⁰

- 8.5.2 However, the NRSW 2023 recognised accessibility as ‘one of the biggest challenges’ noting that ‘Women face a host of constraints while accessing healthcare facilities, ranging from the low priority of women’s health issues, including by the women themselves, lack of permission from the family to seek care, financial constraints, distance to the health facilities, the burden of domestic and care work, etc.’⁶¹ In rural areas, the issue of accessibility was more pronounced and 66% of all women considered that the distance to a health facility was a problem⁶².
- 8.5.3 As stated in their previous reports regarding reproductive health in 2021⁶³ and 2022⁶⁴, the 2023 USSD HR report similarly noted that ‘The government provided limited access to or limited availability of sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Survivors of sexual violence were given a clinical exam and treatment; women survivors were offered emergency contraceptives. Postexposure prophylaxis could be prescribed. Other services provided to survivors of sexual violence varied by province.’⁶⁵
- 8.5.4 Unlike their earlier reports, such as in 2021⁶⁶, 2022⁶⁷, and 2023⁶⁸, the 2024 USSD HR report removed references to women’s reproductive health, aside from repeating that ‘There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization by or on behalf of government authorities.’⁶⁹
- 8.5.5 The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) permits deliberate termination of a pregnancy when the life of the woman is in danger by continuing with the pregnancy, or if she is required to undergo treatment. Causing abortion or miscarriage outside of these permissions may be subject to imprisonment⁷⁰.
- 8.5.6 A country report covering the period January 2022 to March 2024 by ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation, cited a 2024 joint submission to the CESCRR by the Brussels-based NGO Science for Democracy, the International Human Rights Center of Los Angeles-based Loyola Law School and the Pakistani NGO Aahung. The ACCORD country report noted that, according to the submission:
- ‘... abortion is banned by law - with very few exceptions - and is punished with imprisonment or the payment of “diyah”. Diah is a compensation payment that has to be paid by the woman or anyone who helped carry out the abortion to the “heirs of the victim”, that is, to the family that could have inherited from the fetus. An abortion is permitted before “organs have formed” to save the life of the woman or to perform “necessary treatment”. After organs have formed, an abortion is only permitted to save the woman’s

⁶⁰ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 58), June 2024

⁶¹ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 57), June 2024

⁶² UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 58), June 2024

⁶³ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

⁶⁴ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁶⁵ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

⁶⁶ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

⁶⁷ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁶⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

⁶⁹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

⁷⁰ The Pakistan Code, [Pakistan Penal Code \(PPC\)](#) (Article 338(A) to (C)), 1860

life ... The authors note that despite the ban, Pakistan is among the countries with the highest rate of abortions worldwide. Abortions are often carried out in secrecy and in unsafe conditions by untrained practitioners. Consequently, about one third of women experience complications when undergoing an abortion.⁷¹

8.5.7 Citing information from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) State of World Population Report, dated 17 June 2025, the UNFPA Pakistan noted that ‘... for many, especially women and girls, reproductive autonomy remains out of reach.

- ‘Every 45 minutes, one mother dies from a pregnancy-related cause.
- ‘The adolescent birth rate stands at 41 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19, and over 18% of women are married before the age of 18.
- ‘32% of all married women aged 15–49 use modern contraception methods, while over 16% of women have an unmet need for family planning.’⁷²

8.5.8 For general information on healthcare see the [Country Information Note on Pakistan: Healthcare and medical treatment](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

9. Position of women in society

9.1 Demography

9.1.1 The final results of the 2023 national census, published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), recorded a total population of nearly 241.5 million, just under half of whom were women (117.1 million)⁷³. The 2023 census also recorded that there are 72 million women lived in rural areas of Pakistan and 45.1 million in urban areas⁷⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

9.2 Cultural and societal attitudes

9.2.1 The NRSW 2023 noted that, despite enhancements in the rights of women, ‘... many structural and socio-cultural barriers continue to curtail women and girls’ agency and mobility, and the highly patriarchal society, regressive social norms and harmful gender stereotypes perpetuate discrimination and violence against women and girls in all spheres of life.’⁷⁵

9.2.2 The same report found that women ‘... have been facing disparities in every sphere of life, e.g., health, education, employment, political participation, decision-making, economic opportunities, asset and property ownership, etc. Many structural and socio-cultural barriers continue to curtail their mobility and access to educational and economic opportunities. The challenges are deep-rooted and even more entrenched in rural and remote areas.’⁷⁶

9.2.3 The NRSW 2023 further noted that ‘Pakistan’s women [are] largely dependent on male family members such as fathers, brothers, or husbands

⁷¹ ACCORD, [Pakistan: COI Compilation](#) (page 78), April 2024

⁷² UNFPA Pakistan, [Two in three women in Pakistan cannot make decision about ...](#), 17 June 2025

⁷³ PBS, [7th Population and Housing Census 2023](#) (page 7), no date

⁷⁴ PBS, [7th Population and Housing Census 2023](#) (page 4), no date

⁷⁵ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 2), June 2024

⁷⁶ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 3), June 2024

to make important life decisions related to education, health, economic participation, and marriage. Forty percent of women who are not working reported the main reason being that male family members do not permit them to take up a job.’⁷⁷

9.2.4 The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), an independent National Human Rights Institute in Pakistan, noted in their 2024 submission to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) on civil and political rights, that ‘Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms in Pakistani society and institutions, including the judiciary, perpetuate discrimination against women. These norms manifest in various ways, from judicial attitudes to media portrayals that reinforce gender stereotypes. Women’s participation in public life, including journalism, is met with hostility and harassment, often exacerbated by right-wing extremist groups.’⁷⁸

9.2.5 A COI report on Pakistan, covering the period from September 2022 to May 2024, published by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 2024 (2024 Netherlands MoFA report), based on a range of sources, stated that: ‘The participation of women in societal life in Pakistan is not very large, and it can be severely restricted, depending on social circumstances. Whereas women in some cities (e.g. Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad) often enjoy relative freedom, conservative communities in rural areas are much stricter. There have been reports of widespread sexual intimidation of women and girls in public spaces, schools and universities. Some Pakistani women hold high positions in public life, but these are few ...’⁷⁹

9.2.6 A COI report on Pakistan by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA Country Focus), published in December 2024, based on a range of sources, noted that:

‘Women engaged in activism against patriarchal practices are reported to face “some level of risk” from family members and society, experiencing significant barriers and backlash. Nonetheless, some positive changes were noted in recent years, including the emergence of a country-wide movement, specifically advocating for domestic violence laws, as well as an emerging growing awareness on domestic violence issues and relevant legal rights, especially among younger generations and university students. During the reference period of this report, in what was deemed as a “heartening development” by the [Human Rights Commission of Pakistan] HRCP, Baloch women held demonstrations in Islamabad and Balochistan to protest against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. UN Women stated that in recent years the Pakistani Government has taken significant measures to improve gender equality, and many good practices have been implemented. At the same time, “highly patriarchal society, regressive social norms and gender stereotypes” have continued to represent barriers, creating conditions for discrimination and violence against women and girls.’⁸⁰

9.2.7 The April 2025 DFAT report provided a view similar to that of the aforementioned 2024 Netherlands MoFA report:

⁷⁷ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 3), June 2024

⁷⁸ NCHR, [Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on the Government ...](#) (page 6), 2024

⁷⁹ Netherlands MoFA, [General COI Report on Pakistan](#) (page 72), 5 July 2024

⁸⁰ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 132), December 2024

'Women's participation in Pakistani society can be curtailed depending on their cultural, social and economic circumstances. Observation of the purdah (literally "curtain", an Islamic practice of segregating women from unrelated men) in some areas of Pakistan restricts the personal, social and economic activities of women outside the home. While in many instances, women in cities such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad enjoy relative freedom of movement, women living in conservative rural communities are sometimes subject to greater restrictions. Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, schools and universities is common. While some, mostly wealthy, Pakistani women have attained senior positions in public life, their experiences are often not representative of the general female population.'⁸¹

See also [Freedom of movement](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

9.3 Single women

- 9.3.1 Information on the general situation of single women and single mothers was limited in sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 9.3.2 Oraan, a Karachi-based organisation, which enables access to financial services for women in Pakistan, noted in an undated article that there was: '... an existing culture that views unmarried women with pity but worse suspicion. Single women, and to be fair single men, have a very hard time finding housing even in Pakistan's major bustling cities like Lahore and Karachi, because the taboo of not living at home with your family breeds mistrust amongst agents, landlords and even neighbors. It is not uncommon to find listings that state "no single men" or "families only" to discourage non-wed applications from even applying to apartments.'⁸²
- 9.3.3 This view of women (and men) trying to rent property as a single person was echoed in a June 2022 article in The Friday Times (TFT), Pakistan's first independent weekly, which noted that, 'Renting to single, unmarried women in Pakistan is too risky, [landlords] claimed, saying they only rented to "families" ... In the context of a rental, a family means at least one man, if you're a woman. It doesn't matter if they are your father, your husband, or even your 15-year-old brother. Family is family, and in Pakistan, family is men.'⁸³
- 9.3.4 Women living alone in Pakistan encountered intrusive scrutiny from landlords, neighbours, and society, according to stories from women living across Pakistan, reported in a January 2024 article in Dawn's lifestyle magazine, Images. Citing personal experience, the article's author noted that women faced discriminatory rental practices, invasive questions about their personal lives, and restrictive rules not applied to men. The author noted that even financially stable professionals were judged based on perceived morality or family background⁸⁴.
- 9.3.5 An article in the Express Tribune's 'T Magazine', dated July 2025, explored the lived experiences of single women in Pakistan, particularly those who lived alone. It noted how societal judgment, gendered scrutiny, and safety

⁸¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.203), 30 April 2025

⁸² Oraan, [Unwed and Under Your Own Roof: Living Alone in Pakistan](#), no date

⁸³ TFT, ['They Assumed I Ran A Brothel': How Women Wanting To Live Alone ...](#), 18 June 2022

⁸⁴ Dawn Images, [Living alone isn't easy, especially if you're a woman in Pakistan](#), 22 January 2024

concerns shaped their daily lives. Women recounted being treated with suspicion by neighbours, harassed by service workers, and rejected by landlords simply for being unmarried and independent. To avoid unwanted attention, many adopted strategies like dressing modestly, avoiding late-night outings, and maintaining a low profile⁸⁵.

- 9.3.6 According to an article on single motherhood, published by The Nation, a daily English-language newspaper based in Lahore in April 2025, single mothers faced systematic discrimination across Pakistan. The article shared the story of Kiran, a psychologist and single mother, who was denied jobs for lacking ‘husband support’ and faced stigma while raising her daughter alone. The report noted:

‘Single mothers often face immense difficulty obtaining child passports, inheritance rights, and even accessing healthcare without male guardianship. Maternity policies typically assume the presence of a nuclear family, while no major public sector policy explicitly recognises the legal or emotional burden shouldered by single-parent households. Culturally, too, they are frequently marginalised – excluded from school parent-teacher meetings, judged in job interviews, and labelled in extended families.’⁸⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

9.4 Love marriage

- 9.4.1 Most marriages in Pakistan are arranged^{87 88}. Marriage of choice is often referred to as ‘love marriage’, which may occur with or without the parents’ consent⁸⁹.
- 9.4.2 Pakistan-based family law firm, Right Law Associates, noted in 2021 that ‘Love marriage is a type of marriage in Pakistan ... that is unconsented to by the parents of the bride and groom,’ adding ‘A marriage without family consent is generally frowned upon.’⁹⁰
- 9.4.3 A survey of 548 men and women in urban and rural areas in all 4 provinces, conducted in June and July 2024 by Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International, found that, ‘... among married Pakistanis, 4 out of 5 (81%) have an arranged marriage. Survey findings revealed that men were 8% more likely than women to have a love marriage. Additionally, there was minimal difference across rurality as urban residents were only 1% more likely to have a love marriage. Adults under the age of 30 had the highest rate of love marriage (21%) among all three age groups [under 30, 30 to 50, and over 50] that were surveyed.’⁹¹
- 9.4.4 As stated in their previous reports regarding discrimination against women in 2021⁹² and 2022⁹³, the 2023 USSD HR report similarly noted that ‘Women were legally free to marry without family consent, but society frequently ostracized women who did so, or they risked becoming victims of so-called

⁸⁵ Express Tribune, T Magazine, [No country for a woman alone](#), 20 July 2025

⁸⁶ The Nation, [Single Motherhood](#), 6 April 2025

⁸⁷ Landinfo, [Pakistan; Ekteskap og skilsmisse](#) (page 4), 25 January 2021

⁸⁸ Right Law Associates, [Love Marriage or Civil Marriage in Pakistan](#), 24 December 2021

⁸⁹ Arif N and Fatima I, [Marital Satisfaction in different types...](#) (page 36), Volume: 13, Issue: 01, 2015

⁹⁰ Right Law Associates, [Love Marriage or Civil Marriage in Pakistan](#), 24 December 2021

⁹¹ Gallup Pakistan, [Opinion Poll](#), 23 August 2024

⁹² USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

⁹³ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

honor crimes.’⁹⁴ Information on women’s marriage rights was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report⁹⁵.

- 9.4.5 Like their previous reports in 2023⁹⁶ and 2024⁹⁷, Freedom House stated in their Freedom in the World 2025 report, covering 2024 events, that ‘In some parts of urban Pakistan, men and women enjoy considerable personal social freedoms and have recourse to the law in case of infringements. However, social practices in much of the country restrict personal behavior, especially choice of marriage partner.’⁹⁸
- 9.4.6 The Nation, reported in November 2024 on a Sindh High Court ruling, which confirmed ‘... the rights of individuals to marry by choice.’⁹⁹ According to the article ‘In a written verdict addressing the cases of three couples who had entered into love marriages, the court emphasized that adult men and women have the fundamental right to marry according to their own wishes. It further stated that parents cannot subject their children to harassment or violence over such decisions. The court has directed law enforcement agencies to ensure the protection of couples who marry of their own accord.’¹⁰⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

9.5 Lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) women

- 9.5.1 For information on LBT women in Pakistan please refer to the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

9.6 Freedom of movement

- 9.6.1 Information on the general situation of freedom of movement for women was limited in sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 9.6.2 The April 2025 DFAT report noted that:
- ‘Article 15 of the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of movement in Pakistan and authorities generally respect this right. Internal migration is common and widespread as people regularly move to seek better employment and education opportunities. Those migrating often rely on family, friends, tribal and/or ethnic networks to establish themselves in a new location. Social and economic barriers to relocation can impact vulnerable groups disproportionately, including women and their children leaving family violence situations.’¹⁰¹
- 9.6.3 The same report stated that ‘Women require independent financial means, as well as personal and family networks, to relocate after leaving abusive relationships. Women who do leave face increased risk of [Gender-Based Violence] GBV, stigma and steep economic barriers ... Families often

⁹⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

⁹⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

⁹⁶ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2023: Pakistan](#) (G3), 2023

⁹⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024: Pakistan](#) (G3), 2024

⁹⁸ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025: Pakistan](#) (G3), 2025

⁹⁹ The Nation, [Sindh court affirms right to love marriage](#), 30 November 2024

¹⁰⁰ The Nation, [Sindh court affirms right to love marriage](#), 30 November 2024

¹⁰¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 5.29), 30 April 2025

pressured victims to return to their abusers, and in some cases, women were killed when they attempted to leave or seek a divorce.’¹⁰²

See also [Shelters and crisis centres](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

10. Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls

10.1 Prevalence of GBV

10.1.1 The NRSW 2023 noted regarding perception and attitudes to violence against women and girls (VAWG) that ‘Perception of violence and abuse is greatly influenced by deeply entrenched patriarchal socio-cultural norms and prevalent practices, leading to significant gaps in the understanding of VAWG and its normalization within society. These factors limit women’s ability to recognize most forms of violence as a violation of their human rights and a crime according to the law of the land, which contributes to their underreporting.’¹⁰³

10.1.2 Whilst noting some measures taken by the GoP to address VAWG, the UNHRC stated in their concluding observations on the state report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), December 2024, that:

‘... the Committee remains concerned about the high level of violence against women and girls, including murder, rape, kidnapping and domestic violence, as well as the insufficient level of assistance for victims and the extremely low level of convictions for those crimes, leading to impunity for perpetrators. It is also concerned about the lack of comprehensive domestic violence legislation throughout the country and the fact that marital rape is not criminalized. It remains concerned that so-called “honour” killings are still prevalent, that the qisas (equal retaliation) and diyat (financial compensation) laws are reportedly applied to some of these cases and that some tribal councils (jirgas and panchayats) in remote areas continue to exercise jurisdiction over these cases, despite the judgment of the Supreme Court of 2019 declaring those tribal councils illegal ...’¹⁰⁴

See also [Informal justice systems](#).

10.1.3 The NCHR noted in their 2024 submission to the UNHRC on civil and political rights, that ‘The prevalence of violence against women remains alarmingly high.’¹⁰⁵

10.1.4 The April 2025 DFAT report noted that gender-based violence was common in Pakistan but:

‘... data is limited and likely underestimates its true prevalence. GBV often goes unreported due to stigma and a lack of privacy for those impacted. According to data used by UNFPA, 32 per cent of women have experienced violence in Pakistan, with half of these women having never sought help or told anyone about the violence they had experienced. Human Rights Watch stated 10,365 cases of violence against women in Punjab were reported to police in the first four months of 2023. The Sustainable Social Development

¹⁰² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.209), 30 April 2025

¹⁰³ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 89), June 2024

¹⁰⁴ UNHRC, [Concluding observations on the second periodic ...](#) (paragraph 16), 2 December 2024

¹⁰⁵ NCHR, [Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on the Government ...](#) (page 5), 2024

Organization and the Centre for Research, Development and Communication reported at least 5,551 women were kidnapped, 2,818 were subjected to physical assault, and 304 were raped in Pakistan between May and August 2023. Women who have lived experience of rape often avoid reporting out of fear they will be blamed or “honour killed” for dishonouring their family. In-country sources told DFAT domestic violence was commonly viewed as a private matter and police were often reluctant to intervene.’¹⁰⁶

- 10.1.5 The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) summarised some statistics on VAWG in their report on the State of Human Rights in 2024:

‘Data from the National Police Bureau indicates that at least 405 women fell victim to honour crimes during the year. Domestic violence accounted for at least 1,641 cases of murder and 3,385 cases of beating.

‘Cases of sexual assault continued unabated, with police data pointing to 4,175 cases of rape, 733 of gang rape, 24 of custodial sexual assault and 117 cases of incest-based sexual assault.

‘The Digital Rights Foundation received 3,121 cases of cyber-harassment, the majority of which were registered in Punjab by women.’¹⁰⁷

- 10.1.6 In their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024, the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO), ‘a research-based advocacy organization working on issues of peace and sustainable development in Pakistan’¹⁰⁸, presented different data, based on Right to Information requests submitted to provincial police departments. Figures from the ICT was received only from the District Public Prosecutor and did not include information on abductions:

Number of registered GBV cases 2024				
Province	Honour killing	Rape	Abduction	Domestic violence
Punjab	225	4,641	20,720	1,167
KP	134	258	943	446
Sindh	134	243	2,645	375
Balochistan	32	21	185	160
ICT	22	176	-	90
Total	547	5,339	24,493	2,238

109

Rate of GBV per 100,000 women					
Province	Population	Honour killing	Rape	Abduction	Domestic violence
Punjab	34,576,029	0.7	13.4	59.9	3.4
KP	9,868,648	1.4	2.6	9.6	4.5

¹⁰⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.206), 30 April 2025

¹⁰⁷ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 17), 2025

¹⁰⁸ SSDO, [About Us](#), no date

¹⁰⁹ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 8), February 2025

Sindh	13,336,217	1	1.8	19.8	2.8
Balochistan	2,976,610	1.1	0.7	6.2	5.4
ICT	661,051	3.3	26.6	-	13.61

110

[Back to Contents](#)

10.2 Domestic violence

- 10.2.1 Provincial laws aimed at protecting women from domestic violence (DV) included: Sindh Domestic Violence (prevention and protection) Bill 2013, Balochistan Domestic Violence (prevention and Protection) Bill 2014, Punjab Protection of Women against violence Act 2016, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021¹¹¹.
- 10.2.2 Regarding domestic violence, the NRSW 2023 noted that, ‘The analysis for Pakistan relies mainly on the existing data source of the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18 survey, which found that 23% of ever-married women (aged 15-49 years) reported having experienced physical violence, 26% emotional, and 5% sexual violence at the hands of husbands/ intimate partners ...’¹¹²
- 10.2.3 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that:
‘In 2021, the proposal of a Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Bill faced significant opposition from lawmakers and religious groups. The bill is enacted in all provinces except at federal level in the Islamabad Capital Territory. The implementation of the law remains weak. A cultural acceptance of violence against women is reported within the societal mindset at large. Domestic violence, in particular, is perceived as a private matter which “shouldn’t be made public and shouldn’t be brought to court. Therefore, women are discouraged from talking about it”.’¹¹³
- 10.2.4 The SSDO stated in their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024, that:
‘Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Pakistan, affecting both rural and urban areas with similar frequency. It manifests in various forms, including physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and psychological abuse ...
‘Domestic violence persists as a significant issue in Pakistan, with 2,238 reported cases in 2024, though the true number is likely much higher due to underreporting. Punjab reported the most cases at 1,167, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (446), Sindh (375), Balochistan (160), and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) (90). Lower numbers in some provinces, like Balochistan (5.4%) and ICT (13.61%), despite smaller populations, suggest high rates of violence, while Sindh’s low rate (2.8%) indicates significant underreporting. Factors such as weak reporting mechanisms, victim fear, and inadequate legal protections contribute to the gap in data.’¹¹⁴
- 10.2.5 Police data obtained for the 2024 HRCP report noted DV ‘... accounted for at least 1,641 cases of murder and 3,385 cases of beating’ across the

¹¹⁰ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 8), February 2025

¹¹¹ Gulesci S, and others, [Domestic Violence Laws and Social Norms ...](#) (page 26), 2024

¹¹² UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 83), June 2024

¹¹³ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 134), December 2024

¹¹⁴ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 10), February 2025

country¹¹⁵. In Punjab province, 1,167 women were murdered and 2,767 women beaten in incidents of DV, according to the National Police Bureau¹¹⁶. Sindh police reported to the HRCP that there were 222 reported cases of DV against women and girls in Sindh province, resulting in 174 murders and 260 beatings¹¹⁷. KP police recorded 359 women and 9 girls were victims of DV¹¹⁸. There were 175 women victims of DV in Balochistan¹¹⁹. There were 36 cases of DV reported by the National Police Bureau in the ICT, including 14 murders and 22 beatings¹²⁰.

- 10.2.6 A study on 7 shelters across 4 provinces, by UN Women and the NCHR, conducted during 2018 to 2019 and updated in 2023¹²¹, found that ‘About 70% of [the 103¹²²] residents stated that the perpetrators of domestic violence were their husbands and 20% identified their fathers, brothers, in-laws, and close relations. Ten percent identified their mothers as perpetrators.’¹²³

[Back to Contents](#)

10.3 ‘Honour’ crimes

- 10.3.1 A query response on honour killings (2020 to December 2023), by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), noted that:

‘In correspondence with the Research Directorate [in December 2023], a senior research fellow at Sheffield Hallam University whose research includes a focus on honour-related violence in South Asia, stated that the term “honour crime” encompasses a broad spectrum of “harmful” practices carried out under the guise of preserving honor, and that such practices include domestic abuse, violence or death threats, economic abuse, sexual and psychological abuse, acid attacks, forced marriage and child marriage, forced suicide and forced abortion, female genital mutilation and assault, being held against one’s will, and honour killings (2023-12-04).’¹²⁴

- 10.3.2 The April 2025 DFAT report stated that:

‘So-called “honour killings”, in which family members murder relatives perceived to have brought dishonour on the family, occur in Pakistan. According to Human Rights Watch, the most common reason for honour-related crimes is the violation of social norms and what is thought to be accepted social behaviour. This can include a woman’s choice of clothing, employment, or education; refusal to accept an arranged marriage; getting married without family’s consent; seeking a divorce; being raped or sexually assaulted; and having intimate or sexual relations before or outside marriage, even if only alleged. While young men can be targets of so-called “honour killings”, most victims are female. Once a credible threat of a so-

¹¹⁵ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 17), 2025

¹¹⁶ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 46), 2025

¹¹⁷ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (pages 72 and 85), 2025

¹¹⁸ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 117), 2025

¹¹⁹ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 164), 2025

¹²⁰ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 217), 2025

¹²¹ UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (page 17), 2023

¹²² UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (page 41), 2023

¹²³ UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (pages 71 and 72), 2023

¹²⁴ IRB, [Pakistan: Honour killings, including prevalence in different regions ...](#), 3 January 2024

called honour killing is established, the victim sometimes remains at risk even if he or she chooses to relocate.’¹²⁵ No information could be found amongst the sources consulted to corroborate that a person remains at risk of honour killing even if they relocate (see [Bibliography](#)).

10.3.3 Regarding profiles of people targeted, the IRB response noted that ‘The senior research fellow indicated that while honour crimes can impact men, boys, and persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), honour killings of women and girls, particularly those residing in rural areas where the tribal system of social organization holds great influence, are “more common” (2023-12-04).’¹²⁶

10.3.4 The IRB response also stated:

‘In an interview with the Research Directorate [December 2023], an associate professor at a Canadian university who specializes in honour-related violence in the South Asian Diaspora stated that in a country where patriarchy shapes the community, women have historically been more susceptible to honour-related violence (2023-12-04). According to the same source, the concept of honour is shaped by “the value of seeing family as interconnected beings,” which may result in the patriarch resorting to acts of gender-based violence to uphold the family’s honour (Associate Professor 2023-12-04). The Associate Professor noted that though honour killings represent the “most extreme version” of an honour crime, “the fear of honour-related violence can be quite debilitating” because “historically women know that it can be a possibility, and this can shape a women’s view of the ... violence” (2023-12-04).’¹²⁷

10.3.5 Like their previous reports in 2021¹²⁸ and 2022¹²⁹, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that ‘Several laws criminalized so-called honor killings and other acts committed against women in the name of traditional practices. Despite these laws, hundreds of women reportedly were victims of so-called honor killings, and many cases went unreported and unpunished.’¹³⁰

10.3.6 Information on ‘honour’ killings was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report¹³¹.

10.3.7 The IRB response stated that, according to the senior research fellow (Sheffield Hallam University):

‘... while the prevalence of honour crimes in Pakistan has become a “subject of national debate,” there is no official record-keeping by government agencies, resulting in a lack of accurate data on the prevalence of such crimes in the country (2023-12-04). The same source noted that the districts of Kohistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as Lahore, Rajanpur, and Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab, and Kashmore [sic], Larkana, and Jacobabad in Sindh, and Nasirabad in Balochistan, exhibited a higher prevalence of honour killings targeting women and girls (Senior research fellow 2023-12-

¹²⁵ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.210), 30 April 2025

¹²⁶ IRB, [Pakistan: Honour killings, including prevalence in different regions ...](#), 3 January 2024

¹²⁷ IRB, [Pakistan: Honour killings, including prevalence in different regions ...](#), 3 January 2024

¹²⁸ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

¹²⁹ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

¹³⁰ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

¹³¹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

04).¹³²

- 10.3.8 The April 2025 DFAT report indicated underreporting of honour killings, noting that ‘In-country sources told DFAT many more women were killed annually in “honour” crimes than reported, especially in Balochistan and KP.’¹³³
- 10.3.9 Referring to ‘honour’ killings, the SSDO stated in their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024, that:
- ‘A total of 547 cases were reported across the five regions, Punjab with leading at 225 cases. Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) each reported 134 cases, while in Balochistan and ICT the reported cases were 32 and 22 respectively. ICT with less population showing the highest rate of Honor killing 3.3 per 100,000 population, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (1.4) and Balochistan (1.1).
- ‘Sindh’s rate 1.0 suggest that honor killing remain a significant issue, that is likely influenced by tribal systems. Punjab has a lower rate 0.7, despite its large population either indicating low occurrence and underreporting.’¹³⁴
- 10.3.10 According to police data provided to the HRCP, in 2024 there were 178 female victims of honour killings in Punjab¹³⁵, and 134 cases were recorded in Sindh, resulting in 156 victims (women and girls)¹³⁶. Honour killings in Sindh were referred to as karo kari¹³⁷. There were 149 registered cases of honour killing in KP, which included 124 female and 77 male victims¹³⁸, and 67 cases registered in Balochistan (including 33 female and 42 male victims)¹³⁹. No honour killings were reported in the ICT¹⁴⁰. Gilgit-Baltistan police recorded 18 honour killings¹⁴¹.
- 10.3.11 An article by Voicepk.net on 1 August 2025 reported that, according to the HRCP, 155 women and 113 men were killed in ‘honour’ crimes between January and May 2025¹⁴². The same article noted that Sahil, an NGO monitoring violence against women and children, stated that according to their media monitoring, there were 149 honour killings between January and June 2025 – 72 in Sindh, 54 in Punjab, 12 in KP, 9 in Balochistan, and 2 in the ICT¹⁴³. The majority of such crimes were committed by husbands¹⁴⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.4 Early and forced marriage

- 10.4.1 UNICEF, in an undated report, estimated that 18.9 million girls in Pakistan were married before the age of 18 and 4.6 million before the age of 15,

¹³² IRB, [Pakistan: Honour killings, including prevalence in different regions ...](#), 3 January 2024

¹³³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.211), 30 April 2025

¹³⁴ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 9), February 2025

¹³⁵ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 46), 2025

¹³⁶ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (pages 72 and 85), 2025

¹³⁷ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 46), 2025

¹³⁸ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 117), 2025

¹³⁹ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 164), 2025

¹⁴⁰ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 217), 2025

¹⁴¹ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 267), 2025

¹⁴² Voicepk.net, [Breaking the Cycle: Tackling ‘Honour’ Killings Requires Societal ...](#), 1 August 2025

¹⁴³ Voicepk.net, [Breaking the Cycle: Tackling ‘Honour’ Killings Requires Societal ...](#), 1 August 2025

¹⁴⁴ Voicepk.net, [Breaking the Cycle: Tackling ‘Honour’ Killings Requires Societal ...](#), 1 August 2025

indicating that 1 in 6 young women were married in childhood¹⁴⁵.

10.4.2 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus stated regarding child marriage:

‘Under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, the legal age for marriage is 16 for women and 18 for men, except in Sindh Province where the age was raised to 18 for both women and men. In the recently amended Christian Marriage Act 1872 and Hindu Marriage Act 2017, the legal age for marriage is 18 for both men and women. Legislative proposals to raise the age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 years at federal level have faced opposition in Parliament. Executive Director at AGHS [Asma Jahangir Legal Aid Cell] Nida Aly noted that, besides the need to increase the age of marriage as a measure to fight forced conversion and forced marriage of girls, the law itself would need other amendments in order to ensure full protection to girls even under 16.’¹⁴⁶

10.4.3 In May 2025, the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025 was passed to establish 18 as the minimum age for marriage for girls¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁸. UN Women urged the GoP to give equal protections to girls in Balochistan, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa¹⁴⁹.

10.4.4 The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), a statutory group who advise the GoP whether a law follows the rules of Islam¹⁵⁰, declared the ICT Child Marriage Restraint Bill as ‘un-Islamic’¹⁵¹ ¹⁵².

10.4.5 The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) prohibits forced marriage and makes it punishable with imprisonment and a fine (Section 498B)¹⁵³. The PPC also prohibits the practice of Swara (Section 310A) and criminalises kidnapping, abduction, or coercion of a woman to compel her to marry against her will (Section 365B)¹⁵⁴.

10.4.6 Human rights lawyer, Rida Tahir, defined the practice of Swara: ‘Swara (also known as Vani [Wani] and Budla-i-sulh) is a custom/tradition whereby women and girls belonging to the offender’s family are given in marriage or servitude to the aggrieved persons as compensation for reconciliation in case of rivalry, murder, or abduction in order to settle the dispute.’¹⁵⁵

10.4.7 Like their previous reports in 2021¹⁵⁶ and 2022¹⁵⁷, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that ‘... women, and especially young girls, were affected by the practice of swara, in which girls were forced into marriage to compensate for a crime committed by their male relatives. The Federal Shariat Court declared swara or vani to be against the teachings of Islam in 2021; secular courts subsequently issued rulings declaring the practices illegal, but rural

¹⁴⁵ UNICEF, [Child Marriage Country Profile – Pakistan](#), no date

¹⁴⁶ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 136), December 2024

¹⁴⁷ UN Women, [Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025](#), 26 May 2025

¹⁴⁸ Dawn, [President signs child marriage bill into law](#), 31 May 2025

¹⁴⁹ UN Women, [Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025](#), 20 May 2025

¹⁵⁰ CII, [Introduction](#), no date

¹⁵¹ Arab News, [Pakistan Council of Islamic Ideology declares bill to criminalize child ...](#), 28 May 2025

¹⁵² Dawn, [President signs child marriage bill into law](#), 31 May 2025

¹⁵³ The Pakistan Code, [Pakistan Penal Code \(PPC\)](#), 1860

¹⁵⁴ The Pakistan Code, [Pakistan Penal Code \(PPC\)](#), 1860

¹⁵⁵ Tahir, R, [Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan declares the custom of Swara ...](#), 8 November 2021

¹⁵⁶ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 12 April 2022

¹⁵⁷ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 20 March 2023

areas continued to use them.’¹⁵⁸ The 2024 USSD HR report did not include information on swara¹⁵⁹.

10.4.8 The 2024 USSD HR report noted that:

‘The Council of Islamic Ideology declared child marriage laws to be un-Islamic, noting they were “unfair and there cannot be any legal age for marriage.” The council stated Islam did not prohibit underage marriage since it allowed the consummation of marriage after both partners reach puberty. Decisions of the council were nonbinding. Judges routinely cited Islamic law to justify child marriages, forcing families to find and appeal cases to judges who would apply the law.’¹⁶⁰

10.4.9 The same report noted that ‘In rural areas, poor parents sometimes sold their daughters into marriage, in some cases to settle debts or disputes.’¹⁶¹

10.4.10 The April 2025 DFAT report noted that ‘Early and forced marriage occurs in Pakistan, with girls from religious minorities being especially vulnerable ... While the marriage age for girls is 16 (except in Sindh where it is 18), Islamic jurisprudence provides for girls to be married once they reach puberty ... The April 2024 UN OHCHR stated “child, early and forced marriage cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds”.’¹⁶²

10.4.11 The April 2025 DFAT also noted that ‘Demographic Health Survey data from 2017-18 put the incidence of child marriage in KP at 37 per cent, although in-country sources told DFAT all types of forced and underage marriages were no longer common in tribal areas. According to in-country sources, forced marriages were infrequently ordered by traditional jirga councils under a custom known as badal-e-sulah, where girls and young women were given away to settle blood feuds or land disputes among men.’¹⁶³

See also [Informal justice systems](#).

10.4.12 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus referred to forced conversion and marriage of religious minorities and noted that:

‘The phenomenon of forced conversion and forced marriage of girls affected Hindu, Christian and Sikh communities, but mostly Hindu and Christian girls in Sindh and Punjab Provinces. Referring to data by the Centre for Social Justice, Nida Aly stated that between 2021 and 2023, 338 cases of forced conversions were recorded, out of which 230 were Hindus and 106 were Christians. This data is however not exhaustive. Civil society organisations and the media have reported incidents of young Hindu and Christian women being abducted and raped by Muslim men throughout 2023. UN [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination] CERD stated to be “deeply concerned about the frequent reports that women and girls, in particular Hindu Dalit and Christian women and girls, face threats, harassment and intimidation, abductions, sexual violence, forced marriages and forced conversions.” ...’¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 22 April 2024

¹⁵⁹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

¹⁶⁰ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3b), 12 August 2025

¹⁶¹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3b), 12 August 2025

¹⁶² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.214), 30 April 2025

¹⁶³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.215), 30 April 2025

¹⁶⁴ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 137), December 2024

- 10.4.13 The HRCP 2024 report recorded 23 child marriages and one forced marriage in Sindh, according to police reports¹⁶⁵. Similar statistics were not provided for other provinces, though the HRCP did cite some individual cases of child marriage in Punjab¹⁶⁶, KP¹⁶⁷, and Gilgit Baltistan¹⁶⁸.
- 10.4.14 For information on forced conversion through marriage of Christians, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts](#).
- 10.4.15 See also [Drivers of forced conversion through marriage in Pakistan](#), a 2025 report by Legal Aid Society Pakistan and the NCHR on forced conversion through marriage of women and girls from religious minority communities.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.5 Sexual violence

- 10.5.1 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus reported that ‘The law defines rape as a criminal offence, although it does not explicitly criminalise spousal rape. Rape cases are reported as occurring frequently, but their prosecution remains rare.’¹⁶⁹
- See also [Prosecutions and convictions](#).
- 10.5.2 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that ‘According to HRCP’s monitoring, at least 631 women were raped and 277 gang-raped in 2023.’¹⁷⁰
- 10.5.3 The HRCP 2024 report noted that, according to police data, there were 4,175 cases of rape and 733 of gang rape. The same report also noted 24 cases of custodial sexual assault and 117 cases of incest-based sexual assault¹⁷¹. The majority of rape and sexual assault cases against women in 2024 were reported in Punjab – according to police reports there were 3,533 female victims of rape or sexual assault and 639 victims of gang rape¹⁷².
- 10.5.4 The SSDO cited higher figures of rape than the HRCP, reporting in their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024 that:
- ‘Rape remains a serious concern in Pakistan with 5,339 cases reported in year 2024. Punjab dominated the statistics with 4,641 cases. The remaining provinces showing lower figures significantly, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (258), Sindh (243), Balochistan (21), and ICT (176).
- ‘The high prevalence in Punjab is attributed to the combination of higher population, public awareness on reporting, robust law enforcement and media coverage ...’¹⁷³
- 10.5.5 However, the SSDO added that ‘Rape remains widely underreported because of the societal taboos, victim blaming, and lack of trust in the legal system.’¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁵ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 85), 2025

¹⁶⁶ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 50), 2025

¹⁶⁷ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 134), 2025

¹⁶⁸ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 266), 2025

¹⁶⁹ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

¹⁷⁰ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

¹⁷¹ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 17), 2025

¹⁷² HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 46), 2025

¹⁷³ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 9), February 2025

¹⁷⁴ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 9), February 2025

11. Relationships and children outside of marriage

11.1 Legal context

- 11.1.1 The offence of zina defines ‘adultery’ and is covered under the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, 1979. This states ‘A man and a woman are said to commit “Zina” if they wilfully have sexual intercourse without being married to each other.’ Zina is liable to hadd (the punishment decreed by the Quran): stoning to death, or 100 lashes. The Hudood laws apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims, although the punishments differ¹⁷⁵.
- 11.1.2 Due to strict evidential requirements (at least 4 adult male eyewitnesses to the act¹⁷⁶), punishment for zina was described by a legal advocate in Lahore (March 2025), as ‘nearly impossible’ and no executions had occurred¹⁷⁷.
- 11.1.3 Under the Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendment) 2006 Act, sexual relations between parties who are unmarried is considered ‘fornication’ and is deemed an offence, punishable by imprisonment for up to 5 years and a fine not exceeding 10,000 rupees for both men and women¹⁷⁸.
- 11.1.4 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that ‘Several sources noted that the government modified the 1979 Hudud Ordinances through the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment Act) of 2006, which placed the crimes of rape and adultery back into the PPC.’¹⁷⁹
- 11.1.5 An accusation of zina (adultery) or fornication must be lodged directly with the court, and it is an offence to make false accusations¹⁸⁰. In 2022, the Supreme Court expressed concern over the lack of punishment for false accusations of adultery, highlighting the misuse of Qazf laws meant to protect women from slander¹⁸¹. A ‘rare’ case in Sindh in April 2024 saw a man sentenced to 80 lashes for falsely accusing his ex-wife of adultery and denying paternity^{182 183}.

See also [‘Honour’ crimes](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

11.2 Presumption of marriage for unmarried couples

- 11.2.1 Common law marriage (cohabiting without being legally married) was not legally recognised in Pakistan and considered a crime under the offence of zina¹⁸⁴. An article published in lifestyle magazine H! Pakistan in April 2025, noted that cohabitation outside of marriage was uncommon, forbidden under Islamic law, and risked societal backlash, particularly if such relationships were ‘Outside of select circles in major urban hubs like Karachi, Lahore, and

¹⁷⁵ Pakistan Code, [Offence of Zina \(Enforcement of Hudood\) Ordinance 1979](#), 9 February 1979

¹⁷⁶ Pakistan Code, [Offence of Zina \(Enforcement of Hudood\) Ordinance 1979](#), 9 February 1979

¹⁷⁷ Advocate in Lahore, [Adultery in Pakistan](#) (blog), 28 March 2025

¹⁷⁸ GoP, [Protection of Women \(Criminal Laws Amendment\) Act 2006](#), 1 December 2006

¹⁷⁹ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 96), December 2024

¹⁸⁰ GoP, [Protection of Women \(Criminal Laws Amendment\) Act 2006](#), 1 December 2006

¹⁸¹ Express Tribune, [False accusation of adultery goes unpunished, regrets SC](#), 17 May 2022

¹⁸² Dawn, [Man in Karachi sentenced to 80 lashes for denying child’s paternity](#), 8 April 2024

¹⁸³ NDTV World, [Pak Man To Get 80 Lashes For Falsely Accusing Ex-Wife Of ...](#), 8 April 2024

¹⁸⁴ Advocate in Lahore, [Common Law Marriage in Pakistan - A Comprehensive Guide](#), 18 April 2025

Islamabad ...¹⁸⁵

- 11.2.2 Paklawyer.com, a legal services provider based in Lahore, specialising in family law¹⁸⁶, discussed, in an undated article, the implications of non-registration of marriage. Paklawyer.com noted that ‘The Honorable Superior Courts of Pakistan have ... declared that registration of marriage is a requirement of law but its non-registration does not make the marriage invalid.’¹⁸⁷
- 11.2.3 The article went on to cite judgements that indicated a presumption of marriage even without direct proof, which included the case of:
‘... “Abdul Majid Khan another Vs Mst Anwar Begum” reported as PLD 1989 SC 362, the Honourable Supreme Court of Pakistan has laid down that the presumption regarding Muslim Marriage, in absence of direct proof can be raised and acted upon, in the following instances:
(a) Prolonged and continue[d] cohabitation as husband and wife;
(b) The fact of acknowledgement by the man, of paternity of children born to the women [sic], provided all the conditions of valid acknowledgement are fulfilled; or
(c) The fact of the acknowledgement by the man, of the women [sic], as his wife.’¹⁸⁸
- 11.2.4 Though non-registration of marriage may be subject to imprisonment up to 3 months, or a fine, as per the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, Paklawyer.com stated ‘... it is quite clear the non-registration of marriage do not invalidate a marriage if both parties accept the same and where children from that marriage and paternity of children are also admitted by the husband ...’¹⁸⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

11.3 Children born outside marriage

- 11.3.1 Arab News, an English-language daily newspaper published in Saudi Arabia, reported that Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) issued an official statement in July 2022, which said that, since March 2022, single mothers could register their children without providing details of the father:
‘NADRA issued a policy in March this year [2022] that enabled single mothers to get their children CNIC [computerized national identity cards] conveniently without the father’s CNIC ... The policy was introduced following the establishment of the Inclusive Registration Department (IRD) in the Authority in July [2021]. The single mother policy was introduced on the same line that the registration of the destitute, orphans with known/unknown parentage and trans was being carried out by the authority.’¹⁹⁰
- 11.3.2 In March 2025, the Lahore High Court (LHC) ruled that a biological father of a child born outside of marriage or as a result of rape should be liable to pay

¹⁸⁵ HI Pakistan, [Living together before marriage: is Pakistan’s youth quietly breaking ...](#), 28 April 2025

¹⁸⁶ Paklawyer.com, [About us](#), no date

¹⁸⁷ Paklawyer.com, [Oral Marriage and Non-Registration of Marriage](#), no date

¹⁸⁸ Paklawyer.com, [Oral Marriage and Non-Registration of Marriage](#), no date

¹⁸⁹ Paklawyer.com, [Oral Marriage and Non-Registration of Marriage](#), no date

¹⁹⁰ Arab News, [NADRA says it has been helping single mothers register children ...](#), 28 July 2022

maintenance for that child^{191 192}.

- 11.3.3 Reporting on the verdict, digital media platform, Voicepk.net, noted that the LHC made a distinction between a biological and a 'legitimate' child: 'The court clarified the difference between a "biological child," defined as a child genetically related to the parents, and a "legitimate child," a child born to parents legally married at the time of the child's birth. The court noted that a biological child could be born within or outside of marriage.'¹⁹³ Voicepk.net added 'The court noted that while the term "illegitimate" was previously used, the focus has shifted towards ensuring the welfare of the child.'¹⁹⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

12. State treatment and attitudes

12.1 Implementation and enforcement of laws protecting women

- 12.1.1 Like their previous reports in 2021¹⁹⁵ and 2022¹⁹⁶, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that, despite existing laws against 'honour' crimes, 'In many cases, officials allowed the man involved in the alleged "crime of honor" to flee. Because these crimes generally occurred within families, many went unreported. Police and NGOs reported increased media coverage enabled law enforcement officers to take more action against these crimes.'¹⁹⁷
- 12.1.2 The ACCORD country report cited a Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL) article from November 2023, which discussed enforcement of the law on honour killings:
- 'RFE/RL quotes a Pakistani lawyer saying that the law on honour killings was not "fully enforced". RFE/RL explains that honour killings were subject to harsher punishments than homicides and that persons convicted for honour killings – in contrast to those convicted for homicide – cannot be pardoned by the victim's family under Islamic law. However, according to the lawyer quoted by RFE/RL, in police reports, honour killings were often registered as murder cases, which consequently allowed for the pardoning of the perpetrator ...'¹⁹⁸
- 12.1.3 Like their report for 2022¹⁹⁹, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that, according to observers, the implementation of domestic violence laws was slow due to '... lack of resources and awareness, gender and cultural biases, and weak federal and provincial coordination.'²⁰⁰ Information on domestic violence was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report²⁰¹.
- 12.1.4 The NRSW 2023 noted that, despite various laws, legal amendments and policies aimed at curtailing violence against women and girls, '... weak implementation of laws and a lack of awareness and understanding among both duty-bearers and rights-holders limit the effectiveness of these legal

¹⁹¹ Daily Pakistan, [Biological fathers obliged to pay maintenance for children born ...](#), 17 March 2025

¹⁹² Dawn, [Father obligated to maintain child born out of wedlock: Lahore High Court](#), 18 March 2025

¹⁹³ Voicepk.net, [Biological fathers to support children born out of wedlock, even in ...](#), 18 March 2025

¹⁹⁴ Voicepk.net, [Biological fathers to support children born out of wedlock, even in ...](#), 18 March 2025

¹⁹⁵ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

¹⁹⁶ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

¹⁹⁷ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

¹⁹⁸ ACCORD, [Pakistan: COI Compilation](#) (page 82), April 2024

¹⁹⁹ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

²⁰⁰ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²⁰¹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

provisions ...²⁰²

- 12.1.5 Regarding child marriage, the December 2024 EUAA Country Focus cited Nida Aly at AGHS, ‘She noted that whilst the law criminalises anybody who engineers a child marriage, not one single person has been convicted under this law since 1980. Despite a “robust ecosystem of laws” in place, and despite the recent legal reforms (e.g., Hindu and Sikh marriage laws), the implementation of these laws remains a problem and the government has made little efforts to stop such early and forced marriages.’²⁰³
- 12.1.6 The April 2025 DFAT report noted ‘Although forced marriage is a criminal offence, cases filed were often left unprosecuted. In April 2024, the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights] UN OHCHR expressed concern forced marriages of coerced girls were “validated by the courts, often invoking religious law to justify keeping victims with their abductors rather than allowing them to return them to their parents”.’²⁰⁴
- 12.1.7 On forced conversion and marriage of religious minorities, the December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that the UN CERD stated that:
- ‘... while acknowledging steps taken to establish a legal framework, the measures taken by the State to address the root causes have been insufficient, adding to be concerned about the response by law enforcement, investigators, prosecutors and judges, which have failed to effectively sanction forced marriages. State actions against alleged perpetrators were said to be rare, with reports that some clerics and government officials completely denied the existence of this practice. According to HRCP senior council member, Farhatullah Babar, there seems to be “denial at state level that forced conversion is taking place in the country”. When a law was proposed in Parliament to eradicate forced conversions, Babar noted, the Council of Islamic Ideology (a constitutional body which has almost assumed a role of Supra Parliament), advised the parliamentary committee that there was no need for such law since there are no forced conversions taking place in the country.’²⁰⁵
- 12.1.8 Like their previous reports in 2021²⁰⁶ and 2022²⁰⁷, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that:
- ‘Although rape was frequent, prosecutions were rare. The law provided for collection of DNA evidence and included nondisclosure of a rape survivor’s name, the right to legal representation of rape survivors, relaxed reporting requirements for women survivors, and enhanced penalties for rape of survivors with mental or physical disabilities.
- ‘The government did not effectively enforce the Women’s Protection Act, which brought the crime of rape under the jurisdiction of criminal rather than Islamic courts. The law prohibited police from arresting or holding a woman survivor overnight at a police station without a civil court judge’s consent. The law required a survivor to file complaints directly with a sessions court, which tried heinous offenses. After recording the survivor’s statement, the

²⁰² UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 83), June 2024

²⁰³ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 136), December 2024

²⁰⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.211), 30 April 2025

²⁰⁵ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 137), December 2024

²⁰⁶ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

²⁰⁷ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

sessions court judge filed a complaint, after which police could make arrests. NGOs reported the procedure created barriers for rape survivors who could not travel to or access the courts. NGOs reported rape was a severely underreported crime.²⁰⁸

- 12.1.9 Information on rape and sexual violence against women was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report²⁰⁹.
- 12.1.10 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that ‘Despite a legal framework directed at tackling violence against women mostly being in place, implementation of the law remains an issue due to structural issues, a deeply rooted patriarchal environment, as well as a weak and ineffective judicial system.’²¹⁰
- 12.1.11 The SSDO wrote in their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024, that ‘Pakistan’s criminal justice system struggles to address violence against women (VAW), hampered by entrenched societal stigma, patriarchal norms, limited awareness, weak law enforcement, religious beliefs, and systemic obstacles, with low reporting, extremely low prosecution, and conviction rates observed.’²¹¹

See also [Legal context](#) and [Prosecutions and convictions](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

12.2 Access to justice

- 12.2.1 In their Second periodic report submitted to the CESCR, June 2023, the GoP cited the mechanisms in place for investigation of violence against women (VAW) cases and to enable women to access support:

‘For prompt investigation of cases involving violence against women, women friendly helpdesks have been established. A Gender Protection Unit (GPU) has been established at the Islamabad Police Facilitation Centre in F-6, Islamabad in May 2021 to help women and child victims of sexual harassment, rape, and bonded labour. This has made the process of investigating such crimes more effective by encouraging victims to report at the center in the presence of a well-trained team of female police officers, legal officers, psychologists, and medical officers.

‘98% of all Police Stations across Punjab have women friendly help desks whereas three Women Police Stations are also functional in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Faisalabad. Human rights and women rights desks have also been established in police stations in 15 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The KP Integrated Victim Support Network has been set up for networking of relevant services providers (police, hospital, social welfare shelters, etc) which is to be introduced in five districts – Swat, Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, and Abbottabad. Every Police Station and District Police Office in KP has female Police Officer’s Desk to attend to female complainants. The cases against women are immediately reported to the Inspector General of Police, KP and they are pursued in courts through District Public Prosecutors. Women victims and witnesses are the responsibility of the Police Stations under the District Police Officers and are

²⁰⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²⁰⁹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

²¹⁰ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

²¹¹ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 2), February 2025

supervised by the chain of command. Seminars and Special Training Courses have been designed for police officials dealing with investigation of cases relating to women.

‘In May 2020, the first-ever Women’s Police Reporting Centre was inaugurated in the Kurram district. In the same month, women police unit was constituted in Rawalpindi police station, in accordance with which lady police officers and lady police constables were deputed in 12 police stations of Rawalpindi to address and resolve complains and issues of women in an effective way.

‘Meanwhile in Sindh and Balochistan, District Complaint Cells, Women Complaint Cells, Safe Houses, Police Helplines and Police Stations have been set up. Meanwhile, in January 2021, the Balochistan government launched ‘Balochistan Women Helpline: 1089, for registration of complaints against women harassment at home and workplace. The women can register their complaints on the helpline regarding domestic violence, harassment at workplace and property issues.’²¹²

12.2.2 The GoP noted the establishment of special courts addressing gender-based violence (GBV):

‘For effective punishment of the perpetrators and to ensure speedy justice, the NJPMC [National Judicial Policy Making Committee] in November 2019 directed all provincial High Courts to establish special Gender Based Violence (GBV) Courts. There are now currently 36 designated GBV Courts in the province of Punjab are 36 judicial officers are assigned to GBV cases. In the province of Sindh, 27 courts have been designated as GBV Courts and 46 judicial officers have been assigned to GBV cases. In KP, the number of designated GBV courts is 29, and 32 judicial officers are assigned to GBV cases. In Balochistan, there is one GBV court, and 1 judicial officer is assigned to GBV cases. In Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 2 GBV courts have been designated and one judicial officer has been assigned to GBV cases. Recently, Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021 has also been promulgated which provides for the establishment of Special Courts for GBV and gives it a statutory basis.’²¹³

12.2.3 According to the 2023 USSD HR report, ‘The Lahore Gender-Based Violence Court received the most serious cases in the district, such as aggravated rape, and offered enhanced protections to women and girls.’²¹⁴ Information on GBV was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report²¹⁵.

12.2.4 The Inter Press Service (IPS), a global news agency, reported on 4 June 2025 that:

‘In 2021, the government passed the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, leading to the formation of an anti-rape committee by the Ministry of Law and Justice to support victims, including setting up special courts nationwide. “Special investigation units with trained prosecutors now handle 77 percent of complaints, and 91 percent of cases go to special courts,” said Nida Aly of AGHS, a Lahore-based law firm offering free legal aid and part of the

²¹² CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraphs 104 to 107), 22 June 2023

²¹³ CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraph 108), 22 June 2023

²¹⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²¹⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

committee.

‘By 2022, Sindh had set up 382 such units. Aly noted that a survivor-centered, time-bound, and coordinated approach raised conviction rates from 3.5 percent to 5 percent. A national sex offenders registry, managed by police, was launched in 2024. In Punjab, all 36 districts now have crisis and protection centers offering legal and psychosocial support, though some face resource limitations.’²¹⁶

12.2.5 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that:

‘As noted by Executive Director at AGHS, Nida Aly, the current government is taking positive steps to implement the law, for instance by nominating special judges, special prosecutors, special investigating units in police. However, there is a “cultural mindset in society and a preset mindset within all actors of the criminal justice system which does not understand and acknowledge women as survivors or victims of violence.” This is the case for instance for rape cases as well as for cases of so-called honour killings. The same source further observed that a “worrying and dangerous precedent” was recently set by the Supreme Court by overturning “a rape conviction into consensual fornication”.’²¹⁷

12.2.6 The GoP submitted in June 2023 that Pakistan had undertaken extensive training and sensitisation initiatives on GBV across its judicial and legal systems. The Federal Judicial Academy launched a nationwide programme for judges. In 2018, the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) began a project training judges, prosecutors and court officials on women-specific laws. The UNODC and UNDP have supported similar training. Judicial academies in KP and Balochistan have conducted specialised sessions on women’s rights, inheritance, child protection, and GBV. Targeted training for GBV and child rights courts had reportedly reached hundreds of judges and prosecutors nationwide, enhancing legal capacity and enforcement of protective laws²¹⁸.

12.2.7 The April 2025 DFAT noted that:

‘... in-country sources told DFAT despite CSOs [civil society organisations] providing GBV sensitive training to police, their capacity to respond appropriately in GBV matters remained low. Police often behaved insensitively, and viewed GBV as a private, family matter. According to in-country sources, police and the judiciary generally viewed GBV as the “woman’s fault” or did not take reports of GBV seriously. In-country sources told DFAT perpetrators of GBV had successfully bribed police to not file FIRs against them.’²¹⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

12.3 Prosecutions and convictions

12.3.1 The 2023 USSD HR report noted that:

‘Prosecutions of reported rapes were rare, although there were reports prosecution rates increased due to police capacity-building programs and

²¹⁶ IPS, [Why Does Pakistan’s Legal System Continue to Fail Women?](#), 4 June 2025

²¹⁷ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

²¹⁸ CESC, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraph 110 to 114), 22 June 2023

²¹⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.208), 30 April 2025

public campaigns to combat the lack of awareness regarding rape and gender-based violence. NGOs reported police sometimes accepted bribes from perpetrators, abused or threatened victims, and demanded victims drop charges, especially when suspected perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from survivors before registering rape charges, and investigations were often superficial.²²⁰

12.3.2 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted that ‘Conviction rates for gender-based crimes in Pakistan range from 1 % to 2.5 %.’²²¹

12.3.3 The same report noted that ‘The conviction rate in rape cases has been around 3 %, and only recently risen to 5 %. The general mindset within the criminal justice system, including judges and prosecutors, is that “every rape complaint is false.” Women might be reluctant to report violence – among other reasons – also to avoid harassment, including by law enforcement officers.’²²²

12.3.4 In their provincial analysis of GBV in 2024, the SSDO noted that overall conviction rates for rape and honour killing were 0.5%, and 1.3% for domestic violence²²³.

12.3.5 The SSDO provided a tabulated breakdown of GBV cases by type and province in 2024, from registration to final verdict:

Honour killing							
Province	Registered cases	Challand (charge sheet)	Under investigation	Under trial	Conviction	Acquittals	Withdrawn
Punjab	225	200	19	90	2	25	0
KP	134	132	2	129	0	2	0
Sindh	134	34	96	21	0	2	-
Balochistan	32	32	0	28	1	3	0
ICT	22	22	-	22	0	0	0

224

Rape							
Province	Registered cases	Challand (charge sheet)	Under investigation	Under trial	Conviction	Acquittals	Withdrawn
Punjab	4,641	3,403	276	1,126	20	677	46
KP	258	255	3	238	1	4	0
Sindh	243	33	137	10	0	0	-
Balochistan	21	17	4	17	0	2	0
ICT	176	176	-	636	7	338	0

225

²²⁰ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²²¹ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

²²² EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 133), December 2024

²²³ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 7), February 2025

²²⁴ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 11), February 2025

²²⁵ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 12), February 2025

Abduction							
Province	Registered cases	Challand (charge sheet)	Under investigation	Under trial	Conviction	Acquittals	Withdrawn
Punjab	20,720	5,865	2,696	2,398	16	416	768
KP	943	920	23	619	1	8	10
Sindh	2,645	256	1,948	218	0	0	-
Balochistan	185	143	22	136	0	17	1
ICT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

226

Domestic violence							
Province	Registered cases	Challand (charge sheet)	Under investigation	Under trial	Conviction	Acquittals	Withdrawn
Punjab	1,167	783	345	713	3	59	9
KP	446	441	5	422	0	6	0
Sindh	375	58	301	47	0	0	-
Balochistan	160	118	12	68	25	25	0
ICT	22	22	-	22	0	0	0

227

[Back to Contents](#)

12.4 Informal justice systems

12.4.1 Citing various sources, the 2024 Netherlands MoFA report noted:

‘A jirga is an assembly of tribal leaders who make decisions and provide advice on matters within their community. Jirga decisions are a kind of tribal jurisprudence, and they are not legally binding. They are accompanied by heavy social pressure, however, and they are therefore experienced as binding. In practice, they are followed and adhered to. It is not known how often this occurs. Jirgas are led by the Pashtunwali, the set of ancient codes and traditions of the Pashtun people. Islamic law was later added to traditional Pashtun law. For this reason, jirgas are most common in Pashtun areas, in northwest Pakistan, in KP and in the former [Federally Administered Tribal Areas] FATA. Jirgas are occasionally found in Sindh and in Balochistan as well. According to one source, most jirgas are in the former FATA. In areas like Kohistan, jirgas have considerable power, and they take decisions on nearly all matters.’²²⁸

12.4.2 Like their previous reports in 2021²²⁹ and 2022²³⁰, the 2023 USSD HR report stated:

‘The use of informal justice systems that lacked institutionalized legal protections continued, especially in rural areas, and often resulted in human

²²⁶ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 13), February 2025

²²⁷ SSDO, [Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial ...](#) (page 14), February 2025

²²⁸ Netherlands MoFA, [General COI Report on Pakistan](#) (page 144), 5 July 2024

²²⁹ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 12 April 2022

²³⁰ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 20 March 2023

rights abuses. Large landholders and other community leaders in Sindh and Punjab and tribal leaders in Pashtun and Baloch areas sometimes held local council meetings (panchayats or jirgas) outside the established legal system, at times with the support of local police officials and judges. Such councils settled feuds and imposed tribal penalties, including fines, imprisonment, and sometimes the death penalty. These councils often sentenced women to violent punishment or death for so-called honor-related crimes. These councils, meant to provide “speedier justice” than traditional courts, in some instances also issued decisions that significantly harmed women and girls ...²³¹

- 12.4.3 Also echoing their preceding reports^{232 233}, the 2023 USSD HR report noted that ‘There were reports of traditional jirga or panchayat systems of community justice, typically used to resolve low-level disputes or cases of rape in rural areas. The traditional system could have resulted in a survivor being forced to marry the attacker, or a family member on the survivor’s side being allowed to rape a family member of the accused/defendant’s side.’²³⁴
- 12.4.4 The 2024 USSD HR report did not include information on jirgas or panchayat justice systems²³⁵.
- 12.4.5 According to the NRSW 2023, ‘Over time, trends show that the informal justice system has been losing its usefulness due to changes in societal dynamics – in particular, youth, educated segments and urban citizens have less faith in them.’²³⁶
- 12.4.6 The December 2024 EUAA Country Focus noted ‘Women were not allowed to participate in jirgas, even when they were the victims, the main accused, or witnesses.’²³⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

12.5 Legal aid

- 12.5.1 In 2017, the CESCR recommended that Pakistan enhance legal aid for women²³⁸. In follow-up information, the GoP noted in their Second periodic report submitted to the CESCR, June 2023, that:

 ‘To ensure the necessary legal assistance and support to women and ensure their access to provide legal remedies, the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2020 has been enacted which provides legal, financial and other assistance for access to justice to the poor and vulnerable segments of society in criminal cases and for matters ancillary thereto. The Legal Aid Authority under the said Act has been established and fully functional ...

 ‘The Government of Pakistan has also established a statutory endowment fund called the Access to Justice Development Fund (AJDF). One of the objectives of the AJDF is legal empowerment by providing funding under the Legal Empowerment Fund Window, a share of which is utilized for free legal

²³¹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 22 April 2024

²³² USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

²³³ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

²³⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²³⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

²³⁶ UN Women, [National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#) (page 93), June 2024

²³⁷ EUAA, [Pakistan – Country Focus](#) (page 96), December 2024

²³⁸ CESCR, [Concluding observations on the initial report of Pakistan](#) (paragraph 34c), 20 July 2017

aid/assistance to deserving litigants. The funds are provided through District Legal Empowerment Committees (DLEC). Till date, an amount of PKR 60 million has been released to DLECs established in 114 Districts across the country and legal assistance granted to 2832 deserving litigants across Pakistan. Furthermore, the MoHR Human Rights Relief and Revolving Fund provides financial assistance of up to Rs. 50,000 to deserving and needy women ... Four crisis centres in Sindh are also giving out legal aid, with dedicated panels of pro bono lawyers. The Social Welfare Department, Balochistan provides free legal aid and financial compensation to victims of discrimination, women with disabilities and religious minorities. The Punjab Bar Council's Legal Aid Society provides legal aid to marginalized men and women.²³⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

13. Assistance available to women

13.1 Shelters and crisis centres

13.1.1 The GoP noted in their Second periodic report submitted to the CESCR, June 2023, that:

'Various shelter homes (Dar ul Amans), women crisis centers and safe houses are functional at the federal and provincial level to provide residence and rehabilitation to marginalized women. The Women's Shelter working under MoHR provides shelter to women and children. In the ICT, a Family Protection & Rehabilitation Centre for Women (FPRCW) was established, which provides counseling and legal and medical aid to women. Services available at FPRCW include psychosocial, and legal counseling, individual and group therapy to overcome depression and trauma, medical and legal aid, outreach visits, reconciliation, reintegration and social rehabilitation. FPRCW also provides temporary accommodation and food, basic education, professional vocational training and runs its own toll-free helpline service.'²⁴⁰

13.1.2 The GoP went on to note the number of shelters and women supported in provinces across the country:

'In Balochistan, 3 Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women (SBBCW) are functional at Sibi, Khuzdar, and Quetta and 3 more centers are being established at Ketch, Loralai, and Naseerabad districts. In addition, Dar-ul-Aman shelters are also facilitating hundreds of women each year. Besides, a 50-bed old home for women is also under construction in Balochistan.

'Similarly, the Government of Sindh has established Women Complaint Centers (WCC) and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women through which, during last two years, more than 500 victims of domestic violence and honor killing rape, acid throwing, child custody and dissolution of marriage have been given legal aid and socio-psychological counseling. They have also provided 154 women with psycho-social counseling in cases of violence, 150 women received psycho-therapeutic counseling, 64 received legal counseling and 27 received free legal aid. 7 complaint cells have also been established to respond to victims of gender-based violence. In addition, safe homes and protection centers have also been established at district level in Sindh under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioners of the

²³⁹ CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraphs 51, 52), 22 June 2023

²⁴⁰ CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraph 120), 22 June 2023

districts to provide shelter and relief to women victims of violence.

‘In Punjab, women survivors of violence are provided with shelter, welfare and rehabilitation services in women’s shelters (Dar-ul-amans) in all 36 districts. Systematic research on shelter homes by the PCSW shows marked improvement in the services being delivered by these Dar-ul-amans, including legal, health and psychological services. A Violence against Women Centre (VAWC) in Multan was established in March 2017, at the cost of PKR 232 million. The center provides 24/7 services including but not limited to first aid, police reporting, FIR lodging, prosecution, medical examination, forensics and post-trauma rehabilitation under one roof. All these facilities are run and managed by female staff. The project was initially estimated to provide protective and rehabilitation services to 1200 women a year. The staff at that center is trained to provide professional services to victims of offences such as domestic violence, rape, harassment and family disputes.

‘The Provincial Government of KP has established 4 female shelter homes in districts Peshawar, Mardan, Swat and Abbottabad while 2 additional shelter homes are being established in Haripur and Mansehra. The Social Welfare Department is also running 9 welfare homes for destitute and orphaned children. There are two welfare homes dedicated to female children in districts Nowshera and Malakand. KPCSW conducted monitoring visits to Darul Amans/women shelters in Peshawar and Swat. The UN Women and Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department were supported in review and revision of SOPs for Darul Amans/women shelter homes through a one-day workshop.’²⁴¹

13.1.3 As also noted in their previous reports in 2021²⁴² and 2022²⁴³, the 2023 USSD HR report noted:

‘The government continued to operate the Crisis Center for Women in Distress, which referred abused women to NGOs for assistance. Numerous government-funded Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women across the country provided legal aid, medical treatment, and psychosocial counseling. These centers served women who were victims of exploitation and violence. Officials later referred victims to dar-ul-amans – shelter houses for abused women and children – of which there were several hundred throughout the country. The dar-ul-amans also provided access to medical treatment. According to NGOs, the shelters did not offer other assistance to women, such as legal aid or counseling, and often served as halfway homes for women awaiting trial for adultery, but who in fact were survivors of rape or other abuse.

‘Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Many dar-ul-amans were overcrowded; some did not offer access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. In some cases, individuals reportedly abused women at the government-run shelters, and staff severely restricted women’s movements or pressured them to return to their abusers. There were reports of women exploited in commercial sex and sex trafficking in shelters. Some shelter staff reportedly discriminated against

²⁴¹ CESCR, [Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan ...](#) (paragraphs 121 to 124), 22 June 2023

²⁴² USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 12 April 2022

²⁴³ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

the shelter residents, based on a belief that if a woman fled her home, it was because she was a woman of ill repute.²⁴⁴

- 13.1.4 Information on women's shelters was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report²⁴⁵.
- 13.1.5 A report on resourcing women shelters in Punjab published by UNFPA, dated August 2025, noted that 'In line with international guidelines, survivors of violence against women and girls stay in shelters for as long as needed.'²⁴⁶ The average stay was recorded as between 34 and 44 days²⁴⁷. The Balochistan Gender Parity Report 2024, by the Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women (BCSW) and UN Women Pakistan, noted that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women Crisis Centers (SBBWC) provided temporary accommodation for up to 72 hours to '... women and children in distress.'²⁴⁸
- 13.1.6 Citing various sources, the 2024 Netherlands MoFA report noted:
'According to one source, there are state-run shelters in major cities. Private shelters often have financial problems and low capacity. Some shelters for victims of violence are secret. Some resemble prisons, with restrictions on everything, including freedom of movement. According to various sources, there were not enough shelters for female victims of domestic violence or they did not have sufficient capacity. Government centres had insufficient space, staff and resources. Many overcrowded dar-ul-aman shelters did not meet international standards. Some shelters did not provide access to basic needs (e.g. showers, laundry or feminine hygiene products).'²⁴⁹
- 13.1.7 The August 2025 UNFPA report noted that shelters were accessible to all female children regardless of whether they were accompanied by their mothers. However, male children over the age of 12 could not benefit from shelter support but were provided with support via child protection services²⁵⁰.
- 13.1.8 The 2023 study on shelters by UN Women and the NCHR found that, overall infrastructure in shelters was poor, with inadequate security systems, ventilation, and fire safety. Interior spaces like kitchens and bathrooms were in poor condition, and facilities such as counselling rooms, libraries, and visitor areas were often missing. Shelters lacked accessibility for women with disabilities and children²⁵¹.
- 13.1.9 The April 2025 DFAT report noted that, according to in-country sources, 'State-run women's shelters (darul aman) often required obtaining a court order to enter and leave, while private and NGO-run shelters had difficulty meeting the high demand ...'²⁵²
- 13.1.10 According to the 2023 study on shelters by UN Women and the NCHR, 'In all provinces, the admission criterion to a shelter is the issuance of a court

²⁴⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

²⁴⁵ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

²⁴⁶ UNFPA, [GBV Costing Study: Estimating Resource Requirements ...](#) (page 13), 11 August 2025

²⁴⁷ UNFPA, [GBV Costing Study: Estimating Resource Requirements ...](#) (page 42), 11 August 2025

²⁴⁸ UN Women, [Balochistan Gender Parity Report 2024](#) (page 248), 2025

²⁴⁹ Netherlands MoFA, [General COI Report on Pakistan](#) (page 73), 5 July 2024

²⁵⁰ UNFPA, [GBV Costing Study: Estimating Resource Requirements ...](#) (page 29), 11 August 2025

²⁵¹ UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (page 19), 2023

²⁵² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.209), 30 April 2025

order. The study found that 48% of residents were referred there by the courts; 22% by the police; 10% by NGOs; and 20% through family, area nazims [similar to a mayor], friends and others. However, upon admission, all were converted to court cases to acquire legal cover.²⁵³

- 13.1.11 The same study noted that ‘The lack of safe transitional housing remains an issue of particular concern, with several women reportedly killed by their families upon leaving the shelter and many more at risk of further violence.’²⁵⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

²⁵³ UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (page 114), 2023

²⁵⁴ UN Women, [More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans ...](#) (page 18), 2023

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legal context considering laws that protect and/or discriminate - constitution, criminal, penal and civil codes, Sharia and caselaw – applicable to
 - general anti-discrimination provisions
 - specific to women and girls in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field
- Socio-economic indicators (gender comparisons in)
 - Education and literacy
 - Employment and income
 - Political participation
 - Healthcare
- Position of women in society
 - Cultural, family and societal attitudes
 - Single women
 - Love marriage
- Sexual and gender-based violence, including legal status
 - Domestic violence
 - Rape
 - Early and forced marriage
 - 'Honour' crimes
 - Online abuse
- Adultery and extra-marital relations
 - Legal context
 - Unmarried couples and children outside of marriage
- State treatment and attitudes
 - Implementation and enforcement of legislation
 - Access to, and attitudes of, the justice system and the police
- Assistance available to women
 - Support centres and shelters

[Back to Contents](#)

Bibliography

Sources cited

Arab News,

[NADRA says it has been helping single mothers register children since March 2022](#), 28 July 2022. Accessed: 25 September 2025

[Pakistan Council of Islamic Ideology declares bill to criminalize child marriages 'un-Islamic'](#), 28 May 2025. Accessed: 19 June 2025

Advocate in Lahore,

[Adultery in Pakistan](#), 28 March 2025. Accessed: 26 September 2025

[Common Law Marriage in Pakistan - A Comprehensive Guide](#), 18 April 2025. Accessed: 26 September 2025

Arif N and Fatima I, [Marital Satisfaction in different types of Marriage](#), Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology (PJSCP), Volume: 13, Issue: 01, 2015. Accessed: 18 August 2025

Aurat Foundation (AF),

[About AF](#), no date. Accessed: 18 June 2025

[Important Legislation](#), no date. Accessed: 18 June 2025

Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [Country Information Report Pakistan](#), 30 April 2025. Accessed: 26 June 2025

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), [Pakistan: COI Compilation](#), April 2024. Accessed: 27 August 2025

Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), [Introduction](#), no date. Accessed: 19 June 2025

Daily Pakistan, [Biological fathers obliged to pay maintenance for children born outside of marriage, LHC rules](#), 17 March 2025. Accessed: 25 September 2025

Dawn,

[Father obligated to maintain child born out of wedlock: Lahore High Court](#), 18 March 2025. Accessed: 25 September 2025

[Living alone isn't easy, especially if you're a woman in Pakistan](#), 22 January 2024. Accessed: 26 August 2025

[Man in Karachi sentenced to 80 lashes for denying child's paternity](#), 8 April 2024. Accessed: 19 September 2025

[NCSW questions accuracy of Global Gender Gap report on Pakistan](#), 15 June 2025. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[President signs child marriage bill into law](#), 31 May 2025. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[President Zardari signs amendment to Christian Marriage Act](#), 24 July 2024. Accessed: 20 June 2025

European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), [Pakistan – Country Focus](#), December 2024. Accessed: 16 September 2025

The Express Tribune,

[Christian Marriage Act: a milestone, not the destination](#), 22 December 2024.

Accessed: 20 June 2025

[Christian women demand divorce rights](#), 14 October 2024. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[False accusation of adultery goes unpunished, regrets SC](#), 17 May 2022.

Accessed: 19 September 2025

[No country for a woman alone](#), 20 July 2025. Accessed: 26 August 2025

[Pakistan ranks last in Global Gender Gap Index 2025](#), 13 June 2025.

Accessed: 20 June 2025

Freedom House,

[Freedom in the World 2023: Pakistan](#), 2023. Accessed: 18 August 2025

[Freedom in the World 2024: Pakistan](#), 2024. Accessed: 18 August 2025

[Freedom in the World 2025: Pakistan](#), 2025. Accessed: 18 August 2025

The Friday Times (TFT), ['They Assumed I Ran A Brothel': How Women Wanting To Live Alone Are Treated In Pakistan](#), 18 June 2022. Accessed: 26 August 2025

Gallup and Gilani Pakistan, [Opinion Poll: Among married Pakistanis, 4 out of 5 \(81%\) have an arranged marriage, while men, urban residents, and those under 30 yrs of age were more likely to have a love marriage](#), 23 August 2024. Accessed: 18 August 2025

Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), [Women Peace and Security Index 2023/24](#), 2023. Accessed: 20 June 2025

Government of Pakistan (GoP), Finance Division, [Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24](#), 2024. Accessed: 23 June 2025

Gulesci, S, Leone M, and Zafar S, [Domestic Violence Laws and Social Norms: Evidence from Pakistan](#), 29 February 2024. Accessed: 2 September 2025

H! Pakistan, [Living together before marriage: is Pakistan's youth quietly breaking the rules?](#), 28 April 2025. Accessed: 26 September 2025

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), [State of Human Rights in 2024](#), 2025. Accessed: 1 September 2025

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), [Pakistan: Honour killings, including prevalence in different regions of the country and the profiles of individuals targeted; legislation; police and state response; state protection for survivors and surviving family members \(2020-December 2023\)](#), 3 January 2024. Accessed: 2 September 2025

Inter Press Service (IPS), [Why Does Pakistan's Legal System Continue to Fail Women?](#), 4 June 2025. Accessed: 17 September 2025

Landinfo, [Pakistan: Ekteskap og skilsmisse](#), 25 January 2021. Accessed: 18 August 2025

The Nation,

[Sindh court affirms right to love marriage](#), 30 November 2024. Accessed: 18 August 2025

[Single Motherhood](#), 6 April 2025. Accessed: 26 August 2025

National Assembly, [Christian Marriage \(Amendment\) Act 2024](#), 26 July 2024.
Accessed: 20 June 2025

National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), [Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on the Government of Pakistan's Second Periodic Report on Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), 2024. Accessed: 1 September 2025

NDTV World, [Pak Man To Get 80 Lashes For Falsely Accusing Ex-Wife Of Adultery: Report](#), 8 April 2024. Accessed: 19 September 2025

Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), [General COI Report on Pakistan](#), 5 July 2024. Accessed: 25 July 2025

The News International, [Women in parliament](#), 24 June 2025. Accessed: 24 June 2025

Oraan, [Unwed and Under Your Own Roof: Living Alone in Pakistan](#), no date.
Accessed: 20 August 2025

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS),

[7th Population and Housing Census 2023](#), no date. Accessed: 26 June 2025

[Labour Force Survey 2020-21 \(Annual Report\)](#), March 2022. Accessed: 23 June 2025

The Pakistan Code, Ministry of Law and Justice,

[Constitution of Pakistan](#), 10 April 1973. Accessed: 18 June 2025

[Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939](#), 17 March 1939. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961](#), 2 March 1961. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[Offence of Zina \(Enforcement of Hudood\) Ordinance 1979](#), 9 February 1979.
Accessed: 18 September 2025

Pakistan Institute for Education and Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PIE/PAGE), [Girls Education in Pakistan: Statistics & Trends for 2022-23](#), 2024.
Accessed: 23 June 2025

Right Law Associates, [Love Marriage or Civil Marriage in Pakistan](#), 21 May 2022.
Accessed: 18 August 2025

Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO),

[About Us](#), no date. Accessed: 1 September 2025

[Mapping Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: Provincial Analysis of Rape, Kidnapping, Domestic Violence and Honor Killings \(2024\)](#), February 2025.
Accessed: 1 September 2025

Tahir, R,

[Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan declares the custom of Swara as un-Islamic and unconstitutional](#), 8 November 2021. Accessed: 15 September 2025

[Supreme Court of Pakistan Holds that the Courts Cannot Pass a Decree of Khula Without a Woman's Consent](#), 22 April 2024. Accessed: 19 September

2025

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR),

[Concluding observations on the initial report of Pakistan](#) (E/C.12/PAK/CO/1) 20 July 2017. Accessed: 24 June 2025

[Replies of Pakistan to the list of issues in relation to its 2nd periodic report](#) (E/C.12/PAK/RQ/2), 21 March 2025. Accessed: 24 June 2025

[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2022](#) (E/C.12/PAK/2) 22 June 2023. Accessed: 24 June 2025

UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), [Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Pakistan](#) [CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2], 2 December 2024. Accessed: 1 September 2025

UNICEF, [Child Marriage Country Profile – Pakistan](#), no date. Accessed: 11 September 2025

UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Pakistan,

[GBV Costing Study: Estimating Resource Requirements for Women Shelters in Punjab](#), 11 August 2025. Accessed: 23 September 2025

[Two in three women in Pakistan cannot make decision about their reproductive health, says UNFPA's State of World Population Report](#), 17 June 2025. Accessed: 26 June 2025

UN Women,

[Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025](#), Statement by Jamshed Kazi, UN Women Country Representative, Pakistan, 20 May 2025. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025](#), 26 May 2025. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[More than Shelter - Needs Assessment of Dar ul Amans and Shelters in Pakistan](#), 2023. Accessed: 19 September 2025

[National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023](#), June 2024. Accessed: 21 July 2025

US Department of State (USSD),

[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 April 2022. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 20 March 2023. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 22 April 2024, 22 April 2024. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan](#), 26 June 2024. Accessed: 19 June 2025

[2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 August 2025. Accessed: 18 August 2025

[2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025.

Accessed: 18 August 2025

Voicepk.net,

[Biological fathers to support children born out of wedlock, even in cases of rape](#), 18 March 2025. Accessed: 25 September 2025

[Breaking the Cycle: Tackling 'Honour' Killings Requires Societal Shift in Pakistan](#), 1 August 2025. Accessed: 25 September 2025

World Economic Forum (WEF),

[Global Gender Gap Report 2014](#), 2014. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#), June 2024. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#), June 2025. Accessed: 20 June 2025

[Back to Contents](#)

Sources consulted but not cited

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF), [Case Study: Viral Misogyny and the Killing of Sana Yousuf](#), June 2025. Accessed: 16 September 2025

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), [Women in Elections](#), August 2024. Accessed: 24 June 2025

Government of Pakistan Finance Division, [Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25](#), 2025. Accessed: 23 June 2025

Intellectual Nexus, [Trailblazing verdict on maintenance of illegitimate child: 101 critical analysis](#), March 2025. Accessed: 25 September 2025

Just Security, [Jirgas, Gender Violence, and International Accountability](#), 3 September 2025. Accessed: 22 September 2025

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW),

[Digitalisation & Women in Pakistan](#), 2023. Accessed: 16 September 2025

[Islamabad Capital Territory \(ICT\) Gender Parity Report \(GPR\) 2023](#), 2025. Accessed: 18 August 2025

Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), [Increasing women's inclusion in the Pakistan economy](#), 2024. Accessed: 20 August 2025

The Pakistan Code, Ministry of Law and Justice, [Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929](#), 1 October 1929. Accessed: 19 June 2025

Pamir Times, [The Importance of Pro-Women Laws and Their Implementation: Commemorating International Women's Day](#), 14 March 2025. Accessed: 19 June 2025

Provincial Assembly of Sindh (PAS), [Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act, 2013 \(Act No. XV of 2014\)](#), 28 April 2014. Accessed: 19 June 2025

Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, [Punjab Gender Parity Report 2022](#), 2023. Accessed: 18 August 2025

Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL), [Teenage TikTok Star's Killing Sparks Outrage Over Violence Against Women In Pakistan](#), 6 June 2025. Accessed: 16 September 2025

The World Bank, [Five major challenges to girls' education in Pakistan](#), June 2024.

Accessed: 23 June 2025

UN General Assembly, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem; Violence against women and girls, nationality laws and statelessness \[A/78/256\]](#), 28 July 2023. Accessed: 21 July 2025

UN OHCHR, [Pakistan: UN experts alarmed by lack of protection for minority girls from forced religious conversions and forced marriage](#), 11 April 2024. Accessed: 15 September 2025

[Back to Contents](#)

Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **6.0**
- valid from **28 October 2025**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

[Back to Contents](#)

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment in line.

[Back to Contents](#)

Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration
3rd Floor
28 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TE
Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

[Back to Contents](#)