



SINDHI



HIGHLIGHTS

- During the 9 May riots, at least two public buses were torched in Karachi, two security check-posts were burned down and a number of public and private properties damaged. Over 25 PTI leaders including Ali Zaidi, Firdous Shamim Naqvi, Adeel Ahmed, and former Sindh governor Imran Ismail were arrested.
- The Sindh Assembly unanimously approved an amendment to the Sindh Local Government Act 2013 that paved the way for any unelected person to become mayor/ deputy mayor and chairperson/ vice-chairperson of a district municipal corporation or district council for at least six months if elected with the majority of votes in a city/ district council.
- At least four innocent people were killed and nine others— including four Rangers personnel—wounded in a security operation carried out by law enforcement agencies in a village near Sakrand.
- Street crime in Karachi reportedly increased by about 11 percent over the previous year.
- Civil society was visibly divided on the deportation of Afghan migrants and refugees. A large faction of civil society endorsed the government’s repatriation policy, while one group of urban rights activists opposed the action on humanitarian grounds.
- Amid rising cases of kidnapping, the caretaker Sindh cabinet decided to launch a large-scale operation against dacoits in the Katcha (riverine) area with the help of the army, police and Rangers.
- Enforced disappearances of political workers, nationalists, lawyers and journalists continued. According to the Sindh Human Rights Defenders Network, a total of 175 cases were reported from different districts of Sindh during the year.
- The Sindh cabinet approved reserved seats for transgender individuals in local councils.
- Sindh fixed the minimum wage at PKR 32,000 for unskilled workers.
- Following the federal government’s policy of deporting ‘illegal’ foreigners, the provincial caretaker government also deported Afghans who did not possess identity documents.

- The Sindh police continued to use force against protesters through the year.
- Karachi was named the most polluted city in the world in terms of air quality for two successive days in September.



OVERVIEW

The law-and-order situation remained a major cause for concern in Sindh, with a rise in cases of kidnapping for ransom in the Katcha area (along Punjab) in the districts of Ghotki, Shikarpur and Kashmore. Dacoits continued to operate unhindered despite various police operations.

While some dacoits were arrested or killed, the police also lost personnel in such encounters. Law and order in major cities such as Karachi also remained worryingly poor, as street crime continued unabated. Official figures indicated an increase of about 11 percent in street crime in Karachi.

Despite a substantial delay, the local bodies system was restored in Sindh as all local body elections were held and mayors and chairmen elected in all districts. In a noteworthy amendment to the local government law, the Sindh assembly reserved seats for transgender persons for the first time.

Overall, the human rights situation remained compromised in Sindh as cases of enforced disappearance of human rights defenders, journalists and political workers were reported from many districts. The bodies of a number of missing persons were reportedly found in some areas of the province.

Although the Ahmadi population in Sindh is smaller than that in Punjab, multiple attacks and the destruction of Ahmadiyya worship sites were reported in Karachi. Several attacks on Hindu religious places were also reported.

Amid the inadequate public transport systems in both urban and rural areas, the Sindh government launched a robust People's Bus Service in Karachi with a separate 'pink' bus service for women only. There are 57 such buses for women, plying major routes in Sindh.

The Sindh health department claimed to have controlled the spread of polio, compared to other provinces, but at least two polio cases were reported in Karachi.



RULE OF LAW

Laws and law-making

Assembly resolutions. In March, the Sindh Assembly adopted a resolution to consider the recommendations of opposition lawmakers in the upcoming budget for the financial year 2023/24.¹

In May, the Sindh Assembly unanimously approved an amendment to the Sindh Local Government Act 2013 that paved the way for any unelected person to become mayor/deputy mayor and chairman/vice-chairman of a district municipal corporation or district council for at least six months if elected with the majority of votes in a city/district council.² This amendment enabled the PPP to field Murtaza Wahab as Karachi's mayor.

After the 9 May riots that followed the arrest of PTI chairman Imran Khan, in which PTI-led mobs damaged and destroyed public property in several cities, the Sindh Assembly unanimously passed a resolution condemning the violence.³ July saw a volley of legislation proposed and passed in haste, that being the last session—a fact criticized by the opposition leader.

Bills passed. In July, the assembly passed a bill for the e-tagging of habitual criminals to monitor their movement. The Sindh Habitual Offenders Monitoring Bill 2022 allows authorities to attach an electronic device in the form of an anklet or bracelet to the body of criminals or suspected criminals at large or out on bail/parole.⁴

In July again, the Sindh Assembly made several important amendments to the Sindh Local Government Act, giving more powers to mayors and chairmen of municipal corporations.⁵

The same month, the provincial Sindh cabinet approved a bill aimed at fortifying the medico-legal system on modern scientific principles.⁶ Passed in July, the Sindh Immunization and Epidemic Control Act 2023 was designed to tackle comprehensive immunisation and vaccination strategies in the province.⁷

At the end of July, the Sindh Assembly passed the Sindh Faculty of Paramedical and Allied Health Sciences Bill, the University of Mirpurkhas Bill, the Sindh Higher Education Amendment Bill, the Sindh Land Revenue Amendment Bill, and the Sindh Medico-Legal Bill.⁸ It was also brought to people's notice around then that only one private member's bill had been passed by the present house of the Sindh Assembly during its five-year tenure.

The provincial assembly passed the Sindh Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, enabling the government to fix maximum and minimum fares for buses plying dedicated routes and exempting children under three or not exceeding five years from these fares.⁹



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Administration of justice

According to the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, the Sindh High Court had 83,941 cases pending as of end-December, while the district courts in the province had 131,923 cases pending.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAW

Law and order

High levels of crime. Despite tall claims by the provincial government and its police department, the overall crime rate—especially street crime—remained unchecked in the province. According to official data released by the Karachi police for the year, street crime in Karachi increased by about 11 percent in the year. More than 90,000 incidents were reported in the metropolis as compared to 2022, when over 80,000 cases were reported in Karachi.

A total of 134 citizens were murdered, hundreds injured over resisting robberies, and 411 civilians were killed in various incidents. Moreover, more than 59,305 motorcycles and 2,336 cars were stolen or snatched, and over 28,000 citizens deprived of their mobile phones.¹⁰ In the face of rising crime, HRCP documented at least 16 cases of mobs taking the law into their own hands and lynching suspected criminals. Table 1 provides crime statistics for Sindh, with the very high number of police encounters indicating a rise in such cases since 2022. At least 26 police officers were killed in attacks by militants, according to official police data.

Table 1: Crime statistics for Sindh in 2023

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	202
Gang-rape	19
'Honour' killings	168
Police encounters	3,296

Source: Sindh Police, in response to HRCP's request for information

Lawlessness in Katcha areas. Sindh's rural areas also faced significant lawlessness. The inspector general of police, Ghulam Nabi Memon, announced in May that a 'katcha police force' of about 5,000 personnel would be dedicated to fighting criminals in the riverine belt along the banks of the Indus in four districts, Kashmore, Shikarpur, Sukkur and Ghotki.¹¹

Jails and prisoners

Overcrowding in jails remained a severe problem in the province, although having improved slightly since 2022. According to data from the provincial prisons department, Sindh has a total of 22 jails and a total

prison population of 20,031 (including 197 female prisoners) as against a total capacity of 13,938. The total number of juvenile prisoners was 292, while 49 children were living with their mothers in jail. Under-trial prisoners (16,887) far outnumbered convicted prisoners (4,519). The data also indicates that 158 prisoners were on death row, almost all of them for murder.

Enforced disappearances

Data on victims. Enforced disappearances of political workers, nationalists, lawyers and journalists continued in Sindh in 2023. According to data shared by the Sindh Human Rights Defenders Network, a total of 175 cases were reported from different districts of Sindh—with 135 from Karachi—during the year.¹² The Sindh High Court took serious note of the police’s failure to recover missing persons on several occasions during the year.

Official data from the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) indicates that, since its inception in 2011, of 1,787 cases received from Sindh as of end-December 2023, 777 persons had returned home, 41 were traced to internment centres and 266 to prisons, while 63 dead bodies were located over the course of 11 years. At the end of the year, the COIED still had a balance of 163 cases of enforced disappearance from the province.

Short-term enforced disappearances. In a high-profile case in June, lawyer and rights activist Jibrán Nasir was abducted by a group of 15 armed men late at night; his wife suspected that law enforcement agencies were behind his disappearance. Nasir was reportedly abducted for his critical views of the state crackdown against the PTI. He was released within a day as rights organizations, lawyers’ groups, members of civil society and even the then Sindh chief minister, Murad Ali Shah, expressed serious concerns over Nasir’s disappearance.¹³

Soon after, Geo news producer Zubair Anjum was allegedly picked up by plainclothes men accompanied by the police from his home in Model Colony in the early hours of 6 June. He returned home the following day after protests by media bodies.¹⁴

Another journalist, Syed Mohammed Askari of the *Jang*, was picked up by unknown persons in Karachi on 10 July. He went missing near the Qayyumabad interchange after attending a wedding. His colleagues and media organizations alleged that he was abducted by policemen and men in plainclothes. On his return, the journalist told the media that he had been blindfolded and his abductors had asked him certain

questions about his profession. He said he had been dropped off at Sohrab Goth, from where he proceeded home in North Nazimabad.¹⁵

Bodies dumped. The bodies of several missing political workers were also found in Sindh during the year. On 6 February, the body of a missing 35-year-old Sindh United Party activist, Haseeb Junejo, was found dumped near Zero Point, along the Indus River, within the jurisdiction of the Qadirpur police station.

Junejo, who was serving as the party's Sukkur division information secretary, had reportedly gone missing after leaving his home in the New Pind area a day earlier. The area police said the man had been subjected to intense torture and killed with a sharp weapon.¹⁶

In another case, on 6 June, the body of an MQM-P activist, Muhammad Azhar Hussain, who went missing from his Malir home a couple of days earlier, was found, bearing torture marks. The party demanded a high-level probe into his killing. Police and rescue officials said that unknown person(s) had dropped the body off at an Edhi morgue and disappeared.¹⁷



FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Blasphemy cases. At least 18 cases of blasphemy were registered in the province in 2023, according to official police data provided to HRCF. In Sindh's prisons, by November 2023, 82 were incarcerated on blasphemy charges, out of which 78 were under trial and four were convicted, according to data from the Sindh Prisons Department. Karachi had the highest number of blasphemy-accused in Sindh at 47, including two women, Hyderabad had 14 prisoners, Larkana nine, Mirpur five, and Naushero Feroze, Ghotki and Dadu had one prisoner each.¹⁸

Attacks on worship sites. Reports of attacks on the worship places of religious minorities, especially the Hindu and Ahmadi communities, were published in the local and national media.

Reports said that at least two Ahmadiyya worship places in Karachi were vandalized within a week. The first attack was carried out in the Martin Quarters area in January, whereas the other was in February in the Saddar area. As per the first information report (FIR), some policemen were present but could not control the attackers.¹⁹ The same worship place in Martin Quarters was attacked in September again. No action was taken against the culprits. In another incident in July, in Karachi's Korangi area, four persons damaged the minarets of an Ahmadiyya worship place on Drigh Road within the remit of the Shah Faisal Colony police station.

In Karachi, the 150-year-old Mari Mata Temple in Soldier Bazaar was demolished apparently by a builder in July. The mandir was under the management of the Madrasi Hindu community of Karachi. Since it was being said that it was a very old and dangerous structure that could collapse any day, the mandir management, after much pressure, had reluctantly but temporarily moved most of the temple's deities to a small room near a stormwater drain until they could carry out some renovation work onsite.²⁰ Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab said that the plot was owned by the Hindu Panchayat and they had been involved to ascertain the facts. He said that the PPP believed in religious harmony and freedom and no one would be allowed to construct or raze any structure of a place of worship of any minority community.²¹

A gang of dacoits attacked a Hindu temple, reportedly with 'rocket launchers' in Kashmore in July,²² following which the Sindh police announced the deployment of hundreds of policemen for the security of places of worship of minority communities across the province. Sindh

Assembly lawmakers belonging to the Hindu community expressed their concern over the security of their places of worship, while other lawmakers also spoke up on the issue. Unconfirmed field reports suggest that many Hindu families are seeking to migrate to India as a result of worsening law and order and faith-based attacks.

Disruptions to religious festivals. In March, the Islami Jamiat Tulaba reportedly disrupted Holi celebrations by Hindu students at Karachi University, with some Hindu students beaten up during the incident. The vice-chancellor formed a committee to investigate the incident.²³

Inter-faith marriages deemed controversial. The year saw some interesting developments reported widely in both the Pakistani and Indian media regarding at least two Pakistani girls from Sindh who travelled to India and married Indian men.

In January, the case of 18-year-old Iqra Jeevani from Hyderabad was highlighted in the media. She had reportedly married an Indian, Mulayum Singh Yadav. India's Bengaluru police later arrested the couple. Sohail Jeevani, the father of the girl, said that she had gone missing a few months ago. DSP Ghulam Shabbir Sarki told the media that the police and the Federal Investigation Agency had traced the girl, whose travel history indicated that she went from Karachi to Dubai and from Dubai to Kathmandu. On 19 February, the Indian authorities sent the girl back to Pakistan via the Wagah border after arresting the couple.²⁴ The girl was arrested by the Pakistani authorities on her arrival in Lahore.

Reports of a second girl from Sindh went viral as the Indian media reported that a Pakistani girl had converted after marrying a Hindu boy. The Indian police later arrested the couple but they were released after bail by a local court. Seema Haider, a married Pakistani citizen with four children, had entered India illegally through Nepal along with an Indian citizen, Sachin, in July, with whom she reportedly fell in love while playing the online game PUBG. Seema is still living in India as her case is being heard in court.²⁵

Forced conversions. In a rare incident, in March, a judicial magistrate in Karachi handed over custody of an underage Hindu girl to her parents. The girl Ramila, alias Sara, had allegedly been kidnapped in the Shershah area of Karachi by suspect Mohammad Rashid, who purportedly converted her forcibly before illegally marrying her, despite the fact that she was underage. A kidnapping case was registered at the Pak Colony police station on the complaint of the victim's father.²⁶

Around end-March, an alliance of Dalits, including hundreds of women and children from different Scheduled Caste groups, held a rally from the Karachi Press Club to the Sindh Assembly building to highlight a range of issues, including forced conversions and the suspension of the Thar Express railway service from Karachi to India. They also expressed reservations over the then-ongoing digital census, saying that poorer Scheduled Caste Hindus were not being counted properly and their concerns were not being addressed.²⁷

In April, Diplo town in the Tharparkar district shut down over the alleged conversion of a Hindu woman. The protest was prompted by reports that a Hindu woman, Summan Lohana, converted to Islam to marry a man named Sajjad Mehar. The protesters said that Lohana had been lured into a love affair by Mehar and then forced to convert to Islam for marriage. They also noted that some ‘controversial religious figures of Ghotki’ were welcoming such conversions and marriages.²⁸



In April, Diplo town in the Tharparkar district shut down over the alleged conversion of a Hindu woman.

Hindu marriage act. The Sindh Hindu Marriage Registration Act, passed in 2016, was a significant step towards addressing the longstanding issue of marriage registration for Hindus in Pakistan. However, the implementation of this law remains a challenge, despite the framing of rules of business for its execution in 2019. The Act was intended to provide legal recognition to Hindu marriages.²⁹ In June, the Sindh cabinet constituted a committee to bring the Act into accordance with judicial guidelines. The cabinet pointed out that the court had given guidelines for the marriage law.³⁰

Freedom of expression

Violence against media persons. Press institutions in Sindh remained an easy target. In March, during a Geo News team's coverage of an anti-encroachment drive in Gulistan-e-Jauhar, a group of miscreants attacked the team, assaulting the reporter and his cameraman.³¹

In July, a reporter from *Jang* was picked up by men in plainclothes and police uniform from Karachi's Baloch Colony area. Syed Mohammed Askari was returning home from a wedding when the incident took place.³²

On 14 August, journalist Jan Mohammad Mahar, who was working at a private Sindhi newspaper and TV channel, was shot dead in Sukkur.³³ While the police suspected that the incident could be a result of personal enmity, journalist bodies urged law enforcement agencies to arrest the culprit immediately.

In less than a week, the police was able to arrest at least three suspects.³⁴ On 15 August, a large rally was held in Sukkur to condemn the journalist's killing.³⁵

Riots and state crackdown on PTI workers. In May, political unrest in Pakistan reached new heights. The 9 May riots, triggered by the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, led to a crackdown on people responsible for attacking state institutions. In Karachi, a small group of PTI protesters gathered at Shahrah-e-Faisal to protest against their leader's arrest.

The situation got out of control when some people, including elderly protesters,³⁶ attacked a Rangers checkpoint and other important military installations. While the situation in Karachi was quickly brought under control, the protests led to mass arrests, including that of journalists.

A Ghotki journalist was arrested under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance for 30 days for allegedly inciting people to violence.³⁷ A PTI lawmaker, Firdous Shamim Naqvi, was also arrested by the Karachi police in two cases of 9 May violence.³⁸

Curbs on freedom of expression. In separate incidents, the year 2023 also witnessed comments made by different state institutions and ordinary people regarding the working of the media. In its verdict in the Naqeebullah Mehsud case, the Special Anti-terrorism Court in January directed the media to carefully use its right to freedom of expression.³⁹ It said that the right to fair trial 'should not be eroded and infringed upon with overzealous use of the right to freedom of expression.

In February, a report by Reporters Without Borders advised the Pakistan government against criminalizing criticism of the armed forces. It argued that such steps would be an attack on journalistic freedom in the country.⁴⁰

The entertainment industry in Pakistan continued to receive objections from all quarters. The drama 'Jalan' aired on a private TV channel, ARY, was brought to the Supreme Court for 'obscene' content,⁴¹ but the court did not give in to the petitioner's (PEMRA) demand and held that the 'fundamental rights of freedom of expression and right to information apply not only to ideas that are favourably received, but also to those which offend, shock or disturb the state or any other sector of the population.'

Freedom of assembly

Political demonstrations. Throughout 2023, different parts of Karachi hosted political rallies, where leaders demanded that the government pay attention to their grievances.

In February, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) called for a strike in Sindh against economic conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and resultant inflation.

A partial strike was observed in several cities, including Karachi. TLP workers tried to implement the strike orders by force, with ensuing chaos in Keamari, but the situation remained under control.⁴²

During the 9 May riots, at least two public buses were torched on Shahrah-e-Faisal in Karachi, while several other vehicles were also set on fire. Two check-posts each of the Karachi police and Rangers were burned down and a number of public and private properties damaged.

Over 25 PTI leaders, including Ali Zaidi, Firdous Shamim Naqvi, Adeel Ahmed, and former Sindh governor Imran Ismail were arrested. The protests continued for the next two days and more PTI leaders and workers were arrested by the police. At least 300 protestors, including women, were baton-charged on Stadium Road and many dragged away and arrested.⁴³

Earlier, in January, the Karachi police registered cases against leaders and workers of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement on charges of abetting mutiny after a protest outside the Karachi Press Club demanding the release of parliamentarian Ali Wazir and calling on the Sindh government to stop the deportation of Afghans. The police registered an FIR under Sections 153 and 131 of the Pakistan Penal Code.⁴⁴

Women's rally. For International Women's Day, Aurat March organized large marches in Karachi, Hyderabad and Ghotki. The marches demanded equality for women, including minimum wage for women working in both industry and agriculture and as domestic help, as well as the registration of women workers in the informal sector.⁴⁵

In Karachi, the Aurat March took place on 12 March (to encourage working-class women to attend) and saw women, transgender persons, nonbinary persons and male allies gather at Burns Garden to voice their demands.

Assemblies held by workers and peasants. In March, a peasants' protest made headlines after a group of liberated peasant families protested in front of a local press club in Hyderabad to demand legal protection.

Prior to this, several peasants had gone missing and been found in the custody of a landowner who had forced them into bonded labour; some were later freed.⁴⁶ The families demanded that the remaining four prisoners be released immediately.

Political associations and trade unions faced police wrath while exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, especially in Karachi. Workers of the Pakistan Steel Mills have been protesting against non-payment of their salaries, pensions and other allowances since Pakistan Steel closed down its operations in 2015.

In January, retired employees of Pakistan Steel, along with other trade unions, held a demonstration outside the Karachi Press Club. Their leaders told the media that they had not been getting the interest generated by their provident funds for six years; most of them were not even getting their pension under the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution rules.

In July, police and Rangers fired water cannons and tear-gas shells, and baton-charged government schoolteachers, including women, to prevent them from protesting outside the Chief Minister House in Karachi.

The protesting primary schoolteachers were demanding regularization of their services and provision of basic facilities at schools. Police said that 19 protesting teachers were taken into custody.⁴⁷ In September, teachers at the University of Karachi protested against non-payment of salaries for many months and delays in promotions.

Crackdown on nationalists. Nationalists arranged rallies and other events to mark the birth anniversary of Sindhi nationalist leader G. M. Syed on 17 January.

A large number of students and nationalist political leaders gathered in Sann, Jamshoro, as different factions of the Jeay Sindh Movement organized rallies, gatherings and other events.

It is common for law enforcement to arrest—before and after this anniversary—nationalist workers and leaders who are expected to deliver what the establishment considers anti-state speeches. In 2023, the practice was repeated.

A gun battle was reported between police and activists of different nationalist groups in Sann when the police tried to arrest some absconding suspects and initiated a crackdown on ‘anti-state’ elements during the anniversary.

Three policemen and two activists were injured while two police mobiles were torched during the violence. Some leaders of certain nationalist groups claimed that one of their wounded colleagues succumbed to gunshot wounds.⁴⁸



DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Local government

In Sindh, the local government elections were held in two phases. The first phase of the elections in 14 districts was held in June 2022. Elections in the remaining districts, including two major divisions of Karachi and Hyderabad, were held on 15 January 2023, followed by mayoral elections.

Both the Jamaat-e-Islami and MQM-P held several protests and sit-ins in Karachi to protest the delayed local bodies elections and voice objections to the union council delimitations announced by the Sindh government.

A unified MQM-P boycotted the elections just two days ahead of polling day on the delimitation issue.⁴⁹ The government later agreed to the MQM-P's demands and notified an increase of 53 union councils in Karachi. Due to deaths and other reasons, elections for 11 union council chairpersons were postponed and later held on 7 May.

Elections for the mayors of Karachi and Hyderabad were held on 15 June, in which Murtaza Wahab was elected mayor of Karachi and Salman Abdullah Murad was elected deputy mayor.

Interestingly, both were not elected at the union council level. Thus, according to the latest amendment in the Sindh Local Government Act 2013, they had to contest and win the election at the union council level within six months. In Hyderabad, Kashif Khan Shoro was elected mayor and Sagheer Ahmed Qureshi deputy mayor. All of them belong to the PPP.



RIGHTS OF THE DISADVANTAGED

Women

Steps to protect women's rights. As in the past, 2023 did not bring any significant changes for women. In positive developments, however, Sindh's minister for women's development, Syeda Shehla Raza, launched the Sindh Human Rights Commission's three-year strategic plan in January.⁵⁰

Another noteworthy event was the Family Planning Conference 2023 in January, at which health experts called for effective measures to promote family planning. They noted that unplanned pregnancies put the lives of both mothers and infants at risk and that only women's empowerment could help the country reach its family planning goals.⁵¹

The Sindh government took some meaningful steps to help women commuters. In February, the provincial government launched a fleet of 'pink' buses⁵² specifically for women, allowing them to travel freely without fear of harassment.



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The National Commission on the Status of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, held a consultative session in Karachi in February⁵³ and discussed ways to draft a code of ethics to prohibit hate speech against women politicians and parliamentarians.

While the province saw numerous seminars and conferences, many workers remained deprived of their rights. In October, labour leaders and rights activists held a press conference to remind the provincial government of its responsibility for following court orders and ensuring that the rights of lady health workers and of the legal heirs of deceased workers were met.⁵⁴

Aurat March. In March, a day before International Women’s Day, the Sindh High Court dismissed a petition seeking a ban on Aurat March, an annual march held by women and allies in different parts of the province.⁵⁵ The petition itself highlighted people’s lack of willingness to accept women-backed initiatives.

Violence against women. Karachi’s streets remained largely unsafe for women. In July, in the Gulistan-e-Jauhar neighbourhood, a woman was groped by a man in broad daylight.

According to the CCTV footage recovered, he parked his bike in front of a random house, removed his shorts and waited for the woman to appear before he tried to assault her. Fortunately, the woman escaped.⁵⁶

According to the police surgeon, more than 500 women and underage girls were sexually assaulted in Karachi alone during 2023, which also saw 4,042 cases of physical assault against women and girls. [Note: this data is higher than that provided by the Sindh police; see *Law and order*].⁵⁷

Women in political spaces. In August, the MQM-P’s Rana Ansar made history after becoming the first-ever woman opposition leader in the Sindh Assembly.⁵⁸ Her achievement was lauded by PPP lawmakers as well, who were in government.

Children

At a seminar in October, it was revealed that 2,000 children were sexually abused in the first half of 2023. The seminar was organized by Dow Medical College and Dr Ruth K. M. Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi in connection with International Day of the Girl Child.

According to Sahil’s *Cruel Numbers* report for 2023, of a total of 4,213 reported cases of violence against children, 13 percent of these cases were reported from Sindh.

Fatima Fariro, a 10-year-old girl, was found dead in August in an influential landlord’s mansion in Ranipur, Khairpur. Initial reports claimed that the girl was killed and that marks of torture were found on her body. She had worked as a domestic helper in the landlord’s house

and was buried without a post-mortem examination. Her body was later exhumed on court orders; police claimed that she was also raped before she died.

After protests by rights activists and extensive reporting by the media, the police arrested some of the suspects. Later, Asad Shah, the son-in-law of a leading political bigwig and a pir in Ranipur, was also arrested. The police also recovered four other minor domestic helpers from the haveli where Fatima had worked.⁵⁹

Transgender persons

Positive developments. In early January, the Sindh cabinet approved reserved seats for transgender individuals in local councils, along with reserved seats for women, youth, labourers or farmers, non-Muslim members, and persons living with disabilities.⁶⁰ Also in January, the federal government incorporated the transgender community into the Benazir Income Support Programme.⁶¹

On 31 March, International Day of Trans Visibility was observed in Sindh, with events held in Karachi. In November, Karachi's transgender community celebrated the country's first Hijra Festival⁶² while the second Sindh Moorat March took place in Karachi.⁶³

Transgender community concerns. Transgender rights activists voiced their concerns at a press conference in May a day after the Federal Shariat Court ruled that some of the provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 were against Islamic injunctions.⁶⁴

On 4 June, the Sindh High Court issued notices to the provincial health secretary and medical superintendent of the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi in connection with a petition filed against non-provision of treatment to HIV-positive transgender persons.

Two transgender rights activists along with three HIV-positive transgender persons had petitioned the court, stating that the infected petitioners required immediate medical treatment, but were denied this due to their HIV status.⁶⁵

In July, it was reported that UNDP Pakistan had suspended its HIV effective prevention and treatment programme in Sindh, leaving around 18,000 HIV-positive transgender persons in the lurch.⁶⁶

Without naming any entity, UNDP said that some of its sub-recipients were under investigation by its independent Office of Audit and Investigations in New York.

Labour

Minimum wage. Although Sindh fixed the minimum wage at PKR 32,000 in July for unskilled workers, no private factory or work establishment was reported as having implemented this change. Earlier, the minimum wage was PKR 25,000; that too was not implemented.⁶⁷

According to the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, an estimated 80 percent of unskilled workers were not receiving even the previous minimum wage of PKR 25,000 per month. Furthermore, a recent World Bank report found that 83 percent of households in Pakistan were not receiving the minimum USD 2 a day needed to sustain their basic needs. Since this report, inflation has almost doubled while the rupee has lost over half its value against the US dollar.⁶⁸

In May, the Sindh Human Rights Commission launched a campaign to redress complaints over the non-implementation of minimum wages.⁶⁹ Speaking at a provincial consultation on the implementation of the Sindh Minimum Wage Act, chairperson Iqbal Detho said that the commission would provide an online complaint form with the assistance of the Labour Department's Sindh Wage Board.

Opposition to privatization. Workers in Sindh continued to oppose the government's plan to privatize state-owned enterprises such as Pakistan International Airlines, the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), Pakistan State Oil, and Pakistan Railways. In Sindh, the All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union threatened to launch countrywide protests in January if the government did not shelve its plan for the privatization of national enterprises.

At the same time, WAPDA union workers brought out a rally from the Labour Hall in Hyderabad to the local press club in January in protest against the outsourcing of some feeders' reading and billing functions.⁷⁰

Industrial accidents. Industrial fires continued to haunt Karachi throughout the year. In April, at least four firemen were killed and five of their colleagues injured when a multi-storey factory building collapsed early in the morning after its structure was drastically weakened by a fire that had broken out a day earlier in the industrial unit located in New Karachi. Four other persons were also injured in the collapse.⁷¹

Sanitation workers. Sanitation workers continued to fight for their right to minimum wage during the year. The Sindh High Court in January directed the Sindh government to comply with a legal minimum wage of PKR 25,000 for sanitation workers deployed in all departments across the province.

The direction came after a petition seeking the implementation of the minimum wage law for all sanitation workers employed by the local government department and Sindh Solid Waste Management Board.⁷²

At least six sanitation workers from Sindh died as a result of poor occupational safety and health such as inhalation of noxious fumes. On 7 May, the body of 32-year-old Babar Masih was found several days after he had drowned in a manhole in Karachi.⁷³

Miners. At least four coal miners died when a coal mine caved in in Jhimpir in January. The Jhimpir SHO said that the labourers had become trapped after water seeped into the mine and caused it to collapse. No efforts have been taken to prevent and pre-empt such incidents.⁷⁴

In another incident, at least three miners died and five suffered injuries in different accidents while working in coalmines in Lakhra, Jamshoro, in November.⁷⁵ In a second incident in November, three miners were injured when a generator collapsed on top of them in a mine.⁷⁶

Persons living with disabilities

In February, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah urged the corporate sector to adopt inclusiveness by providing more employment opportunities to speech- and hearing-impaired youth.⁷⁷

In the same month, former president Dr Arif Alvi asked the banking sector and state institutions to employ and facilitate differently abled people to make Pakistani society more inclusive, besides making disabled persons active and productive citizens.⁷⁸

Refugees. Following the federal government's policy of deporting 'illegal' foreigners within a one-month deadline, the provincial caretaker government also took steps to deport Afghans who did not possess identity documents. In Sindh, civil society was visibly divided on the deportation of Afghans. A large faction of civil society endorsed the government's policy, while one group of urban-based rights activists opposed the action, citing fears that those with legal documents were also being deported.

Academics, lawyers and civil society activists in a statement requested the government to deport all irregular migrants from the country, especially from Sindh, in accordance with the country's laws and UN conventions. The statement, issued by 86 persons, including noted activists Arfana Mallah, Amar Sindhu and others in Hyderabad, argued that irregular migrants had become a burden on Sindh's resources, jobs, education, healthcare system, language and culture.⁷⁹



In Sindh, civil society was visibly divided on the deportation of Afghans.

In contrast, the Joint Action Committee for Refugees, a collective platform of Karachi-based lawyers, activists, academics and progressive quarters called on international human rights watchdogs and the caretaker government to give immediate access to legal counsel to all Afghan detainees as the allegedly indiscriminate crackdown continues.⁸⁰

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RIGHTS



Education

In September, after Karachi University teachers launched protests demanding payment of salaries, the Karachi University Teachers Society president, Dr Saleha Rehman, criticized the vice-chancellor for non-payment of salaries to evening class teachers and emphasized that teachers were also denied increments. The vice-chancellor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi, however, dismissed these demands as baseless and pointed out that 70 percent of students had not paid their fees over the last three years, and that the Higher Education Commission had not increased the university's grant since 2018 despite inflation.⁸¹

Due to the 9 May riots in the city, the British Council cancelled its 'O' and 'A' level exams scheduled for 9 and 10 May; the matriculation boards across the province, however, decided to hold the annual Secondary School Certificate exams as scheduled.⁸² Although Sindh was the first province to lift the ban on student unions through an act in 2022, no union activity was formally restored in 2023.

Health

Poor air quality. The start of 2023 was difficult for the people of Karachi in terms of health. In January, at least 18 people died in the city's Keamari district due to inhalation of toxic chemicals from factories in the area.⁸³ All these deaths occurred between 10 and 16 January. Around three adults were among the dead; the rest were children.

In February, a group of medical experts tried to draw the attention of the Sindh government to the matter of toxic air quality in Sindh and called it the biggest public health threat. They asserted that since the level of air pollution in Karachi was not as high as it was in Lahore, the issue of toxic air quality remained ignored. They urged the authorities concerned to reactivate the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency and establish a mechanism to keep regular checks on air quality and impose bans on the release of hazardous emissions in the city.⁸⁴

Spread of disease. May rattled the entire country when reports of two Congo virus-related deaths surfaced.⁸⁵ The first death from the virus was reported in Karachi. The unavailability of life-saving facilities in Balochistan also pushed Congo virus patients in the province to travel to Karachi to get the necessary treatment. In November, an infected doctor travelling from Quetta to Karachi died en route,⁸⁶ once again exposing flaws in the country's public health infrastructure.

The overall picture suggests that Sindh became a hot spot for all kinds of viruses. In September, the province reported its first malaria death in Tharparkar. The same month, a news report suggested that Sindh had reported 4,608 malaria cases in 24 hours.⁸⁷ In addition, by September, Karachi had already reported 900 dengue cases.

Karachi's water became deadly for residents when experts detected the presence of the *Naegleria fowleri* amoeba in the water, leading to at least one death.⁸⁸ Another health scare that the city faced throughout the year was the presence of the polio virus in sewage samples collected at regular intervals in Karachi. At least two polio cases were reported from Karachi in 2023,⁸⁹ including a 31-month-old child.⁹⁰

In March, Covid-19 made a comeback in the province. By 19 March, the positivity rate in Karachi had reached over 35 percent.⁹¹ However, the situation remained under control.

In September, a contagious eye disease, conjunctivitis, led to several infections among adults and children in Karachi.⁹² Medical experts blamed low rainfall and poor air quality in the city for the spread of the virus. The situation was exacerbated when the eyedrops used to treat the infection started disappearing from the market, resulting in black market prices. In the wake of this crisis, the Drugs Regulatory Authority of Pakistan approved a 20 percent hike in the price of the eyedrops.⁹³

Vaccination. The city remained far behind in meeting its vaccination targets. In October, authorities launched a vaccination campaign in Sindh to vaccinate 10.3 million children.⁹⁴ The five-day campaign was extended to a week in Karachi, which had several 'super high-risk' union committees. These collectively had 89,000 children who either refused vaccination or were unavailable when the vaccination team reached their homes.

Suicide. According to data from the Edhi Foundation, at least 180 men and women committed suicide in Karachi during the year.⁹⁵

Healthcare systems. Irregularities in the healthcare system continue to mar the province. The Sindh government's decade-old initiative of transferring the management of service of provincially run basic health units to public-private partnerships continued to inconvenience dozens of patients.⁹⁶ The inefficiency of such programmes led not only to the shortage of medicines but also the unavailability of surgeons and other medical professionals at the health units. The health situation was also dismal in the province's prisons. Because of the floods in Sindh in 2022, many prisoners remained exposed to waterborne diseases. In Sindh, 19 prison facilities were housed in flood-affected areas.⁹⁷

Housing and public amenities

Homes for flood-affected persons. The Sindh government started the year with the challenge of rebuilding the homes destroyed or damaged by the 2022 floods. On 1 February, the Sindh chief secretary announced that flood victims would get PKR 300,000 per damaged house in instalments from 8 February.⁹⁸

A survey had concluded that around 2.058 million houses were partially or completely damaged; PKR 50,000 was earmarked for partially damaged houses. The chief secretary also announced that the World Bank had committed USD 500 million for the housing project. He said that the Sindh government was giving USD 250 million while the federal government had also promised to provide USD 250 million for rebuilding homes.

In the first week of August, the Sindh government announced it was building houses for 2.1 million flood victims across the province. The programme was set up under the Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affectees and ownership of these houses was to be given to women affected by the floods.⁹⁹

While these announcements seemed promising, implementation was slow. Many flood victims kept waiting for the government to honour its promises for months.¹⁰⁰ Displaced people whose homes had been damaged by the floods remained in Karachi, living in the city's slums to make ends meet.

Low-income housing. The Sindh minister for local government and housing and town planning, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, announced the government's plan to start a low-cost housing project for people from low-income households. Under the programme, single-unit bungalows spanning 80, 100, 120, and 200 square feet were supposed to be built. The programme was to be carried out under the Malir Development Authority.¹⁰¹ No additional information about the programme is available.

August also saw the term completion of the provincial government and the reins of governance handed over to a caretaker government. In the same month, the setup announced a ban on the approval of new housing projects and the construction of multi-storey buildings across Sindh for an indefinite period.

Sources privy to the matter believed the decision was taken to halt the construction of 'portion' houses, which had led to violations of building laws in several instances.¹⁰²

A welcome development during the year was the announcement by the caretaker chief minister of Sindh, Justice (R) Maqbool Baqar, of a project for people living in Karachi's Martin, Clayton and Pakistan Quarters. Under the project, the residents who would otherwise be displaced under the urban rejuvenation plan would have newly constructed homes in residential towers.¹⁰³

The fate of thousands of families living along the Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs did not see any significant change. Most families continued living amid the rubble of their now-demolished homes. While some families received the compensation promised by the provincial government, most waited for the authorities to honour their promises of providing alternative housing units to affected people by 2022—a promise that remained unfulfilled in 2023.¹⁰⁴

Building checks. After the 2022 floods, authorities in Sindh proactively ran checks on the health of buildings to avoid any large-scale destruction in the monsoon season. The survey, conducted by the SBCA Technical Committee on Dangerous Buildings, was carried out in May; it was found that at least 550 buildings in Karachi were in dilapidated condition.¹⁰⁵

Infrastructure and transport problems. The provincial government's lackadaisical approach towards resolving Karachi's infrastructure problems allowed open drains in the city to remain a death trap for several unsuspecting civilians. In May, the tragic story of a boy in Gulshan-e-Iqbal shook the nation.¹⁰⁶ The boy fell into an open drain and his body could not be pulled out for months. Three months later, in August, a toddler fell into an open drain in the city's Memon Goth area and lost his life.¹⁰⁷

Karachi's roads also remained dug up in major residential areas. The Sindh government's decision to simultaneously launch different reconstruction projects left the city in poor shape, with residents facing problems during commutes. The provincial government had started projects worth PKR 10 billion.¹⁰⁸

The government's performance regarding the bus rapid transit project was dismal throughout the year. The caretaker chief minister also showed irritation over the slow progress on the merger of two major bus lines—Green and Orange. This delay kept millions of people from utilizing an economical bus service in the city.¹⁰⁹

The Sindh government also learnt little from the 2022 Shahrah-e-Faisal accident where a father and his two daughters were killed when his motorcycle was run over by a dumper. Heavy vehicles continued to ply the roads during peak hours, leading to several deaths.

A journalist at *The News* lost his life after his motorcycle was run over by a speeding truck near the Akhtar Colony signal in May.¹¹⁰ In November, another speeding water tanker claimed the lives of a woman and her infant son when it collided with the motorcycle the woman was on.¹¹¹

Environment

Although Lahore is now infamous for its poor air quality, the air quality in Karachi was vying for this slot in 2023. Karachi was named the most polluted city in the world for two successive days in September, in terms of air quality.

It is worth noting that an AQI reading in the range of 151–200 is considered unhealthy, while an AQI reading between 201 and 300 is even more detrimental to health. [See also *Health*].¹¹²

In a briefing given to the Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change, it was said that while the overall cover of mangroves in the Indus Delta had increased over the years, Karachi continued to lose these ‘protected’ forests on account of land allotments by the Board of Revenue and Karachi Port Trust.¹¹³

In a historic judgment, the Sindh High Court barred any mining and excavation in the Karoonjhar Mountains in Nagarparkar, Tharparkar district. A two-judge bench stated that the Sindh Mines and Minerals Department did not enjoy jurisdiction over the mountain range because it was a protected heritage site.¹¹⁴

Culture

Sindhi Culture Day is celebrated every year across Sindh on the first Sunday of December. Also known as ‘Sindhi Ajrak and Topi Day’, the day is celebrated to highlight the province’s rich culture. In 2023, activities related to the day started in the morning and continued through the night.¹¹⁵

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