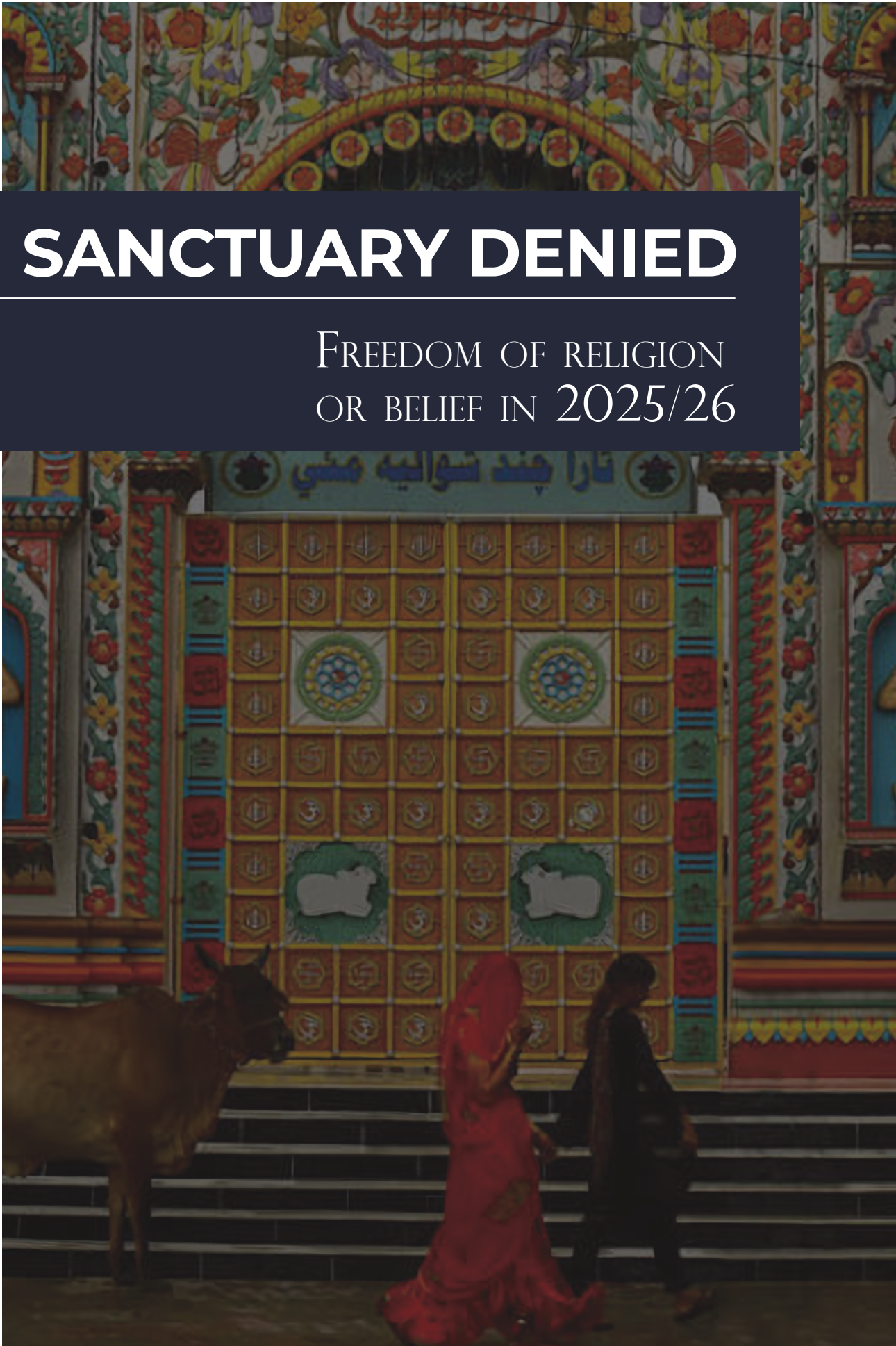


The background of the report cover is a photograph of a Hindu temple. The upper portion shows a colorful, ornate archway (Prabhavali) with floral and geometric patterns. The lower portion shows a large, multi-colored door (Prabhavali) with a grid of small panels, each containing a different religious symbol. In the foreground, a brown cow stands on the left, and two women, one in a red sari and one in a black sari, are walking towards the right. The scene is set at night, with the temple's lights illuminating the scene.

SANCTUARY DENIED

FREEDOM OF RELIGION
OR BELIEF IN 2025/26

Sanctuary Denied

Freedom of religion or belief in 2025/26



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

Aiwan-e-Jamhoor

107 Tipu Block, New Garden Town

Lahore 54600

T: +92 42 3583 8341, 3586 4994, 3586 9969

E: hrcp@hrcp-web.org

www.hrcp-web.org

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Introduction

The different minorities experience varying levels of discrimination, individual attacks, mob violence and destruction of their places of worship. Prosecution for hate crimes against minorities is limited, providing a sense of impunity for perpetrators and adding to the fear among victims. Pakistan's legal system and political discourse lack a comprehensive concept of 'minorities'.

— [European Commission Joint Staff Working Document](#)

District courts, Faisalabad. The interviewee dropped his voice to a whisper when uttering the word blasphemy. He was wary of a group of lawyers chatting in a huddle at a short distance. In a court, a reader accidentally prefixed 'Muhammad' to a Christian lawyer's Muslim-sounding name. He was afraid of making the correction, lest he risk an allegation of blasphemy. An Ahmadi man talked of being nervous each time someone took a longer look at his national identity card. Such is the pressure that members of the minority community in Pakistan constantly find themselves under.

While the Constitution of Pakistan lacks a general definition of 'minority', it explicitly defines 'non-Muslim'.¹ Accordingly, when documenting violations related to freedom of religion or belief (FORB) in Pakistan, we examine the status of religious minorities in the light of the constitutional guarantees, particularly Article 20, which concerns freedom of religion. The present study, which examines the state of FORB in Pakistan, covers the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

The review period began in July 2025 with the Islamabad High Court overturning, on review, its earlier direction regarding the formation of a commission to investigate the alleged entrapment of hundreds of blasphemy accused by an organised group with alleged collusion of elements within the country's main investigating agency. Since then, the accused and their families remain in legal limbo, awaiting justice and accountability.

The Ahmadiyya community faced violence in the form of attacks on their lives and property. Alarming, twice in the review period, Chenab Nagar (formerly Rabwah) was the target of terrorist attacks. There is a noticeable creeping movement against the community, which aims at the social exclusion of the Ahmadis. A trend was observed where shopkeepers refused entry to Ahmadiyya community members. In another instance, an Ahmadi person disclosed that a courier company refused to deliver a parcel in Chenab Nagar on the pretext that it is an 'Ahmadiyya place'. A left-wing political party from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had to publicly rebut a smear campaign accusing its leadership of having ties with the Ahmadiyya community.

¹ Article 260(3)(b) of the Constitution of Pakistan defines non-Muslims to include Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Ahmadis, Bahais, and Scheduled Castes.

The review period witnessed the continued weaponisation of the blasphemy law, reflecting the sense of impunity with which false accusations were made. The report records the case of a blind man who was wrongly accused after the accuser allegedly failed to extort money from him. In a positive development, bail was granted to several victims of the so-called blasphemy business group, but hundreds still languish in jail. The alleged perpetrators of the entrapment of unsuspecting young people have not yet been investigated. A religious scholar was also a victim of a blasphemy accusation after he made certain comments about another religion's view of Islam.

Hate speech against minorities became increasingly normalised during the review period. Derogatory comments were made in the federal capital against churches by a right-wing party leader at a gathering to protest the demolition of a mosque in the city. A campaign was also launched by the right-wing parties when an Ahmadi civil servant was decorated with a civil award.

Girls from minority communities continued to disappear and be coerced into wedlock by older Muslim men. An underage Christian girl's ordeal is included in the report alongside that of Hindu girls. Weak police response and poverty worsened the struggles of the victims and their families. Alarming, a Hindu human rights activist posted on a social platform about alleged threats from a right-wing party for his activism against forced marriages of Hindu girls in Sindh.

The United Nations and leading human rights watchdogs repeatedly voiced concerns about the treatment of minorities in Pakistan. Among others, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International raised these concerns. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has specifically documented and highlighted these issues throughout the year via social media posts, press releases and fact-finding reports.

The report also examines shrinking job opportunities for minorities, some of whom, despite a five percent job quota in government services, end up sweeping roads or doing menial jobs. Cases of sanitation workers losing their lives in sewers during the review period are also included in the report. The report also looks at the Islamisation of school curricula.

Apathy towards minority issues in mainstream media has not only continued but become more pronounced. Social media, which is more susceptible to fake news and propaganda, has become the major news source.

On the positive side, the federal government enacted the much-needed National Commission for Minorities Act 2025, implementing a direction of the Supreme Court's 2014 judgement, commonly known as the Jilani judgement. However, the report notes with concern that after about seven months, the Act has not been operationalised, as the setting up of commission is still awaited.

The report also notes with satisfaction the passing of marriage restraint laws in Balochistan and Punjab, raising the marriageable age to 18. It hopes that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will soon follow suit, lending uniformity to the marriageable age of boys and girls around Pakistan.

2 Methodology

For this report, HRCP has relied primarily on documents in the public domain. These include news reports, articles, official statements, press releases, and reports from international and national human rights organisations. Where possible, information was cross-checked against multiple sources to establish the chronology and accuracy of events.

Given limited coverage of FORB-related abuses in mainstream media, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and WhatsApp were consulted cautiously. Only information corroborated through multiple sources was used. Care was taken to avoid compromising the integrity of the information.

Human rights defenders from the Christian, Ahmadiyya, and Hindu communities were interviewed. In total, seven people were interviewed, and one focus group discussion was held. Documents on individual cases provided by minority communities were carefully reviewed before making assessments. Two senior human rights lawyers were consulted to understand the legal dimensions and ensure the recommendations were legally sound and practical.

The names of Ahmadiyya community members interviewed for this report have been changed to protect their identities.

3 Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community

During the period under review, the Ahmadiyya community continued to face persecution caused by social exclusion, targeted violence, administrative incompetence, and restrictions on religious freedom.

Mob violence and attacks on Ahmadiyya places of worship

Each time, the script remains the same: an inflamed crowd, a handful of ringleaders urging violence, and police standing by until the damage is done.

— [Editorial](#) in *Dawn*

Consistent with previous FORB reports, mob-led violence against Ahmadis and their religious sites persisted throughout the period under review. Such incidents occurred frequently in both urban areas and rural fields in Pakistan, raising questions about the capacity of law-enforcement agencies to pre-empt and prevent mob attacks. In its comprehensive report documenting incidents targeting the Ahmadiyya community, the [National Commission for Human Rights](#) (NCHR) (2026, p. 5) rightly noted: ‘While individual incidents differ in form and intensity, the record demonstrates repeated interaction between organised religio-political mobilisation and government responses that frequently prioritise containment of agitation over protection of rights’.

In July 2025, police from several stations [intervened](#) to thwart a frenzied, religiously charged mob from attacking an Ahmadi place of worship in Samanabad, Lahore. The worshippers included many women and children who were rescued and shifted to a secure area. The protesters reportedly accused the Ahmadi community of violating the Friday worship schedule.

Also in July, Sialkot police [arrested](#) 51 persons for attacking police in Ralioke village near Daska. Police had attempted to stop a mob, armed with hammers, sticks, and iron rods, from demolishing the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya’s Baitul Zikr. The mob was so emboldened by a sense of impunity that when the SP investigation Sialkot reached the spot, it turned on the police and ‘pelted them with stones and opened fire’.

In August 2025, in Faisalabad, on the eve of Independence Day, as members of the Ahmadiyya community prepared for celebrations, a [mob](#) of around 300 people led by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), now a proscribed entity, set two Ahmadi places of worship ablaze. Community members who tried to resist were severely beaten, and their houses were pelted, causing damage to the structures.

Tensions erupted in September 2025 after a 55-year-old Ahmadi woman, Qudsia Tabassum, passed away and locals opposed her burial in a graveyard established in 1945. A group of TLP supporters gathered at the site, attacked two people, and fired into the air. In the ensuing [violence](#), five Ahmadi community members were injured when a mob attacked them in the Piro Chak area of Sialkot district. One victim sustained a bullet wound, and four others were beaten with rods.

Rabwah under attack

The attack on the security guards at the central place of worship in the heart of Rabwah had no other purpose than to instil fear among the community members. It was a message that even those who are meant to protect you are not safe, not even in Rabwah.

— An official of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya interviewed for this report.

The period under review was marked by two terrorist attacks in Chenab Nagar (formerly Rabwah), home to the national leadership offices of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan and about 70,000 Ahmadis.

On 10 October 2025, six security guards were injured when an attacker, armed with a pistol, opened fire outside an Ahmadiyya community's worship place in Gol Bazaar, a busy commercial area in central Chenab Nagar. Two policemen deployed on the opposite side of the road retaliated and [killed](#) the assailant.

In a similar incident on 6 June 2026, three Ahmadiyya community members sustained bullet injuries when an unidentified gunman opened fire outside a place of worship in Chenab Nagar's main commercial centre, as the worshippers were performing night prayers. According to police, a bearded young man on a motorcycle stopped near the gate of the worship place, pulled out a pistol, and opened fire on volunteers before fleeing. An official of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya to whom HRCP spoke, suspects that the assailant is the same person who shot and killed Dr Mahmood Sheikh in Sargodha in May 2025 (see [Human Rights Commission of Pakistan](#), 2025, p. 8).

On 6 September 2025, a procession marking Eid Milad-un-Nabi started in the nearby Muslim Community, passed through Rabwah before concluding at the Larri Adda (central bus stand). Normally, such processions are festive in nature, but speakers used vitriol against the local Ahmadiyya community. According to a key informant interviewed by HRCP, they called for an end to the 'domination of "Qadianis" [a pejorative term] in Rabwah' and urged the participants to 'confront Ahmadis directly'.

Desecration of places of worship and graveyards

Data from the Ahmadiyya community states that nine Ahmadiyya places of worship were attacked and damaged during the review period. In five cases, law enforcement agencies carried out the demolitions. These incidents occurred in Gujranwala, Nankana, Bahawalnagar, and Khairpur. According to interviews with the community, the demolitions are carried out under cover of darkness, often without legal notice or formal orders, raising serious concerns about violations of constitutional protections and due process.

In a landmark Lahore High Court ruling by Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh in the case of *Imran Hameed vs. The State* on 10 April 2023, the court stated that Sections 298-B and 298-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) do not mandate the structures of Ahmadiyya places of worship built before Ordinance 20 of 1984 to be 'razed or altered'. However, on the night of 29–30 September 2025, the minarets of an Ahmadi place of worship were [demolished](#) by local police in Chishtian, district Bahawalnagar. The place of worship was reportedly built in 1980 and therefore enjoyed the protection of the high court's decision. In another apparent violation, Revenue Department officials demolished the mihrab of a place of worship constructed in 1934 without issuing prior notice, according to a key informant interviewed for this report.

According to the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, authorities are reported to frequently deny Ahmadis access to public cemeteries, desecrate their graves, and side with violent mobs that disrupt funerals. Highlighting the role of authorities, the [report](#) adds

that even though the country's local government laws give union councils administrative power over graveyards, the execution of this authority remains discriminatory, affecting Hindus and Sikhs as well. The report notes that 'Ahmadi cemeteries are often subject to encroachment; authorities systematically deny burials there and fail to protect the sites from mob desecration.' It further states that 'anti-Ahmadi ordinances are frequently misused to justify police interference in Ahmadi funerals under the guise of maintaining peace—a practice that effectively criminalises funeral rites.'

Deliberate ostracization of the Ahmadiyya community

Notices refusing services to Ahmadis are not uncommon in Chiniot, which lies across the Chenab River from Rabwah (Chenab Nagar). Alarming, such notices have started appearing throughout the country.

In one instance recounted by Tahir, a key informant for this report, a shopkeeper recognised female members of his family as Ahmadi by their veils. 'He shouted so scornfully that they feared for their safety and called me to pick them up immediately', said Tahir, a member of the Ahmadiyya community. He also recalled an incident in which a security officer at a checkpoint in northern Pakistan took his CNIC to a colleague, informing him that the card bearer was an Ahmadi, as if this were a security threat. Thankfully, the other officer ignored it and let them go. 'I get jitters every time someone looks at my CNIC a little longer than necessary,' said Tahir.

In another interaction, a key informant, Taimur, described an incident in which a courier company refused to deliver a package to his address in Rabwah because it had a policy against delivering to Ahmadiyya community areas.

When a senior government official was awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his services in diplomacy, a campaign was launched by right-wing forces denouncing the move because that he was an Ahmadi. Among those condemning the conferring of the civil award was the Central Bar Association, Muzaffarabad, in a press release dated 9 May 2026.

Victimisation of the Ahmadiyya community on religious occasions

What runs inside the mind of an Ahmadi while reading the Kalima does not constitute an offence punishable under Section 295-C PPC.

—The Supreme Court in *Tahir Naqash and others vs The State*²

Religious occasions such as Eid and Ashura became flashpoints for policing and criminalising Ahmadiyya religious practices. On 6 July 2025, an Ahmadi man was arrested in Gujranwala for distributing biryani on the 10th of Muharram (Ashura) under Section 298-C of the PPC. During Eid ul Azha, anti-Ahmadiyya activity intensified. This religious occasion was marked by right-wing forces issuing letters to district authorities to prevent Ahmadis from performing Eid rituals.

A [letter](#) by Amnesty International to the chief minister of Punjab reported that on Eid-ul-Fitr, Ahmadiyya 'congregations were explicitly prohibited in Gujranwala and police intervened at six locations in Sialkot to stop all worship activities'. The letter also noted similar incidents in Faisalabad and Sargodha.

² PLD 2022 Supreme Court 385.

Forced conversions

Studies demonstrate that young women and girls from minority groups in Pakistan experience heightened incidences of violence and detrimental behaviours, including child marriage, abduction and conversion. These acts not only infringe upon their fundamental rights but also sustain cycles of poverty and isolation.

— [National Commission on the Rights of Child](#) (2026)

The issue of forced conversion is a stark example of how FORB-related violations intersect with gender, age, and poverty in Pakistan. The usual pattern is that parents of a girl, invariably from the poorest section of society and from a minority community, report her disappearance or abduction, only to find a few days later that their daughter has accepted Islam and married a Muslim man, often much older. This pattern continued in 2025/26. Hindus in Sindh and Christians in Punjab were again the common victims.

Human rights organisations, both national and international, critically viewed the situation and pointed out how repeated incidents impede girls' freedom of religion or belief.

The latest annual [report](#) by the National Commission on the Rights of Child takes a closer look at the problem of child marriage and 'its frequent overlap with forced conversion':

A significant share of underage marriages involving girls from religious minority communities—Hindu and Christian girls in particular—are accompanied by a religious conversion in the same act. In practice, the marriage is used to legitimise the conversion, and the conversion is then used to defeat the very 'age-of-marriage' protections the law provides (2026, p. 36).

The report also notes that 'minority children are over-represented in nearly every adverse child rights indicator and under-represented in the policy conversations and budgetary decisions that determine the response' (2026, p. 57).

The law restricting the age of marriage in Islamabad Capital Territory was passed in May 2025, followed by Balochistan in November 2025 and Punjab in May 2026. However, minorities feel less confident when right-wing forces denounce the legislation. 'We (the minorities) are deeply perturbed when a leader of a mainstream religious party states on the floor of the National Assembly that he will defy the law,' said a veteran Christian human rights activist, referring to a speech by a right-wing party leader denouncing the legislation raising the marriageable age to eighteen.

The United Nations has repeatedly raised concerns about forced conversions in Pakistan. In a [press release](#) issued on 22 April 2026, UN experts 'expressed serious concern about the continued and widespread patterns of abduction and forced religious conversion through marriage affecting women and girls belonging to minority communities in Pakistan, as impunity fuels this relentless practice'. The experts noted that in 2025, about 75 percent of the victims of forced conversion through marriage were Hindu and 25 percent Christian; and around 80 percent of incidents took

place in Sindh. It further said that ‘adolescent girls between 14 and 18 are particularly targeted, and some girls are even younger’.

Faqir Shiva Kachhi, a Hindu minority rights activist from Sindh, has been fighting the cause of minor Hindu girls, especially from lower castes, against forced conversion for nearly a decade. According to details he provided HRCP for this report, 36 underage Hindu girls, mostly from scheduled castes, were abducted in 2025. In the first seven months of 2026, the figure was 32. ‘And these are the ones we know of. There might have been countless others,’ he said. He also mentioned the police’s reluctance to act promptly. ‘We have to stage sit-ins in front of the police station and superintendent’s office just to get an FIR registered,’ he said.

Those who raise the issue of abducted minor girls and forced conversion often put themselves at risk. In December 2025, Faqir Shiva Kachhi posted on X (formerly Twitter) that his life was [threatened](#) by those involved in the abducting girls in Sindh. ‘My life is in danger. Those involved in forcibly converting Hindu girls are falsely accusing me of being anti-Islam and anti-state. They want to have me killed just like Dr Shahnawaz Kumbhar.’³

Maria, daughter of Shahbaz Masih, a driver and resident of Lahore, endured an ordeal similar to many girls of minority faith in Pakistan. The case is emblematic of systemic failures to protect minority girls from abduction and child marriage.

On 29 July 2025, Maria went missing after leaving home to go to a neighbourhood shop. Her father, Shahbaz Masih, filed an FIR reporting her abduction. On 31 July 2025, she appeared before the magistrate, claiming she had converted to Islam and married Ahmad voluntarily. Police closed the abduction case based on her statement and the marriage certificate.

Thereafter, the family filed a case seeking recovery of their daughter, leading to a detailed judgment by the Federal Constitutional Court in March 2026. The court ruled that Maria was of ‘mature age’ and that her conversion and marriage were lawful. The [ruling](#) dismissed NADRA and union council records as unreliable.

According to Safdar Chaudhry, a human rights defender spearheading Maria’s case, who was interviewed for this report: ‘The reinvestigation report by the police led by an SSP concluded that the marriage certificate submitted by the accused is forged and has no legal standing. Furthermore, the union council certificate and the NADRA B form, both issued by government departments, confirm that Maria is a minor. These are facts that we hope will not be ignored by the court when it takes up the review petition.’

Her family claims she was 12–13 years old at the time of her disappearance. They also claim that, to mislead the court, Maria was presented dressed like an adult, wearing full make-up and high heels, which surprised even her family.

Police have often been accused of bias against minorities in such cases. ‘Police never informed the family of Maria’s court appearance or involved them in the investigation. They issued an *akbrajnama* [closure of the FIR] even after reviewing the marriage certificate, which didn’t bear her CNIC number, signatures, or thumb impression. Nor were there any witnesses from her side of the *nikkah* [marriage contract]. Police never consulted NADRA to ascertain her age,’ said Chaudhry.

³ Dr Shahnawaz Kumbhar was extrajudicially killed in Sindh in September 2024, following accusations of blasphemy.

Misuse of the blasphemy laws

Despite dozens of mob and vigilante attacks on people for alleged ‘blasphemy’ in recent years, the government has failed to hold the perpetrators of such attacks accountable.

— [Human Rights Watch](#) (2026, p. 344)

The weaponisation of blasphemy law continued during the reporting period, with recurring patterns of personal vendetta, extortion and misguided religiosity driving the accusations. Although religious minorities are common targets, an influential scholar of the majority religion was also accused of blasphemy after making comments about the Christian faith.

On 26 August 2025, Muhammad Ali Mirza, a religious scholar with a large online following, was [arrested](#) by Jhelum Police under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance for his comments on Christian beliefs about Islam. Later, an FIR under section 295-C of the PPC was registered against him. On 24 September, responding to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency’s inquiry, the Council of Islamic Ideology ruled the scholar guilty and recommended action against Mirza under relevant laws.

After nearly three and a half months of incarceration, Mirza was granted bail on 3 December 2025. Since his return, he has spoken repeatedly in favour of victims of the so-called blasphemy ‘business group’. Unscrupulous elements allegedly entrapped hundreds of young people with false allegations of blasphemy. They are languishing in jails, mostly in Adiala Jail, where Mirza was also held. He has suggested a limited amendment to the blasphemy law to allow for ‘repentance’.

In May 2026, the Islamabad High Court declared the Council of Islamic Ideology’s 2025 opinion against Mirza ‘null and void’. It [ruled](#) that the Council had no legal authority to issue opinions on the criminal culpability of individuals.

Every acquittal is evidence of the accuser’s malicious intent and the hollowness of the accusations. Acquittals during the reporting period demonstrate how blasphemy accusations are sustained by mala fide intent, faulty investigations and social pressures. In several cases, courts saw through these claims and granted relief to the accused.

Nadeem Masih’s ten-month ordeal ended on 23 June 2026 when he walked out of a Lahore prison a free man. Visually impaired and the sole breadwinner of his family, 49-year-old Nadeem was arrested on 21 August 2025 in a park in Model Town, where he earned a living by charging for the use of his weighing machine. Allegedly, the park contractor tried to extort money from Masih and, when he refused, levelled fabricated blasphemy charges against him. The Lahore additional sessions judge [ordered](#) Masih’s release in a case registered under Section 295-C after accepting the defence’s argument that guilt ‘must be proven beyond reasonable doubt on the basis of reliable and legally admissible evidence.’

In another case involving a false accusation of blasphemy, the trial of a man accused of desecrating the Holy Quran was ongoing as of 30 June 2026. The police had registered FIR No. 701 on 27

April 2024 under Sections 295-A and 295-B of the PPC. The [trial](#) formally commenced on 16 January 2025 and remained underway during the period under review.⁴

The plight of victims of the blasphemy business group persisted during the reporting period. In its annual report, [State of Human Rights in 2025](#), HRCP drew attention towards this issue ‘involving the alleged registration of fraudulent online blasphemy cases for extortion’ which ‘urgently requires investigation due to the inherent dangers surrounding blasphemy allegations’ (2026, p. 36). The first half of 2025 saw live streaming of court proceedings in the writ petition by the parents of the victims, culminating in the Islamabad High Court’s decision to order the commission to investigate the allegations. In July 2025, the decision was ‘overruled on review’ by a division bench of the Islamabad High Court. Since then, the alleged victims and their families remain in limbo, awaiting relief and accountability. However, in a somewhat positive development, reportedly around 50 of the accused have been released from custody either on bail or through acquittal.

As misuse of the blasphemy law has increased, the number of inmates accused of blasphemy has risen substantially, posing administrative and security challenges for the prison administration. According to data on the official website of the Punjab Prisons, the total number of inmates in blasphemy cases was 559 on 28 June 2026. Of these, five were women and one was a juvenile. Seven were listed as ‘confirmed condemned prisoners.’ The total number of under-trial prisoners was 491, of whom four were women. These statistics depict a grim fact that an overwhelming majority of blasphemy-related prisoners are under trial, subjecting them to prolonged incarceration without conviction.

Data from other provinces on individuals accused of blasphemy was not readily accessible on their websites. However, earlier research indicates that most blasphemy-related inmates were confined to Punjab’s prisons.

Most studies by human rights agencies, including those conducted by HRCP, paint a worrying picture of the living conditions in the overcrowded prisons of Pakistan. Those accused of blasphemy face an even worse situation. Out of fear of attacks from other inmates, they are housed together, either in a single barrack or in the same cells, further shrinking the physical space available to them.

⁴ The accused was subsequently acquitted by a Lahore sessions court on 6 July 2026, after the prosecution failed to establish any direct link between him and the alleged act of blasphemy.

Systemic violence and discrimination

Hate speech

HRCP [deplores](#) the recent derogatory remarks made by a cleric against places of worship belonging to minority communities, in this case, Christian churches. Such statements not only demean the faith of millions of citizens but also incite hatred and undermine Pakistan's constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion or belief under Article 20.

— Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (14 August 2025)

Hate speech against minorities has not only increased but also become normalised. Such a trend helps create an enabling environment for intimidation and violence. While speaking about the demolition of a mosque in Islamabad, the Ameer of the Jamiat Ulema Islam in Islamabad made insulting and unsubstantiated [remarks](#) about churches in Pakistan. He alleged that authorities in Islamabad had given space to other religions and sects where they built their 'churches and whatnot', calling them 'heaps of filth'.

Referring to the normalisation of hate speech, a senior Christian lawyer and human rights defender interviewed for this report said: 'In the past, Eid Milad-un-Nabi used to be all about celebration and festivities. Now it is marked by children chanting slogans that call for beheading blasphemers. How are minorities, who are often accused of blasphemy, supposed to feel when such slogans are chanted near their neighbourhood?'

School curricula and minority beliefs

Education is often seen as a bulwark against religious bigotry. Conversely, it can also indoctrinate students. In September 2025, the Cecil and Iris Chaudhry Foundation published a report pointing out that the textbooks used in our schools are 'riddled with content that undermines pluralism, promotes hate speech, religious and gendered hierarchies, and distorts historical narratives'.⁵ The report analysed around 150 textbooks from all four provincial textbook boards for grades 1–10 and warns of the 'real consequences for millions of children who are subjected to curricula that isolates them from society... [and] preaches uniformity instead of celebrating diversity'.

A perusal of textbooks in subjects such as English, Urdu, and social studies for the purposes of this report substantiates the findings above, that such textbooks are 'often laden with religious instruction that disregards the faiths and experiences of minority students.' The report notes that 'Islamic content in non-religious subjects directly contradicts Article 22(1) of the Constitution of Pakistan, which guarantees that no student shall be forced to receive religious instruction in a faith other than their own'.

Memorising the Holy Quran hands certain candidates a distinct advantage over others at the time of admission to certain universities. Where the subject of study is not religion, such preferential

⁵ Cecil and Iris Chaudhry Foundation. (2025). *A dive into the education landscape of Pakistan: Trends, challenges and solutions*.

marks appear unjustified. Although under the updated criteria, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council no longer awards 20 marks to Hafiz-e-Quran candidates in admission tests such as the MDCAT, which was also upheld by the Supreme Court, many leading universities across Pakistan still [award](#) 20 marks to candidates who have memorised the Holy Quran.

The plight of sanitation workers

Sanitation work is stigmatized because of its symbolic association with caste-designated occupations within the traditional caste system in South Asia. The caste system has persisted into present-day Pakistan and has largely been transposed onto religious identities.

— [Amnesty International](#) (2025, p. 9)

The plight of sanitation workers in Pakistan illustrates how discrimination based on religion and caste determines access to work. Christians in Punjab and lower-caste Hindus in Sindh often take hazardous sanitation jobs without protective equipment, leading to several fatalities. The deaths of sanitation workers during the review period are too frequent to be dismissed as isolated incidents.

In September 2025, Vishal, Shahir, and George [suffocated](#) to death in Usmanabad, Karachi, while they attempted to clear blocked gutters. In April 2026, Wilson, Waqas and Nazeer died after inhaling [toxic fumes](#) while cleaning a choked sewerage line in Surjani Town, Karachi, on a Friday evening.

In June 2026, Water and Sanitation Agency employee Wasim Masih and his aide, Ikram Dogar, descended into a sewer line in Bahawalpur to manually unclog the pipes but were overcome by toxic gases and [asphyxiated](#). They were taken to a hospital where both were pronounced dead.

A [report](#) by Amnesty International (2025) described how sanitation workers ‘are subjected to discriminatory recruitment and working practices, based on caste and religion’. Fifty-five percent of sanitation workers interviewed ‘recognised their caste/religious identity as a defining aspect of discriminatory recruitment and hiring practices’. The report cites a man from Bahawalpur who was interviewed for the post of an electrician but was offered a sanitation worker’s job when interviewers learned he was Christian. He accepted the job because he needed income to support his family.

Neglect and encroachment of properties

In September 2025, the Evacuee Trust Property Board [removed](#) its rent collector in Sargodha after complaints of illegal occupation of land belonging to a historical temple in Bhalwal. The matter was earlier raised by political leader Nadeem Afzal Chan in a video on his X account.

On 11 June 2026, Punjab government authorities [seized](#) the 11.5-kanal Ewing Hall, leased to Forman Christian College University (FCCU). According to FCCU, the university was allegedly given 24 hours to remove furniture, generators, and artefacts. This triggered a sharp response from FCCU, the HRCF, and heritage activists who condemned the move.

[Data](#) presented before the first meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Minority Caucus in December 2025 showed that Pakistan has 1,285 Hindu worship sites and 532 gurdwaras, but only 37 are functional. This is mainly due to sparse Hindu and Sikh population in those areas and lack of maintenance by relevant authorities.

In December 2025, during a special session of ‘Taxila Baithak’, participants discussed the rapidly deteriorating condition of the [Raghunath Temple](#), one of the oldest surviving Hindu places of worship in Taxila. A symbol of the region’s cultural harmony, the temple had ‘fallen into alarming

neglect, prompting heritage experts, civil society members, and the local community to demand urgent restoration and protection’.

Positive developments

HRCP [welcomes](#) in principle the passage of the National Commission for Minorities Bill 2025, which fulfils a long-overdue constitutional obligation first underscored in 2014 by the Supreme Court. Noting that the legislative debate and amendments reflected some political friction, we intend to review the bill closely but emphasise that the proposed commission must protect all religious minorities equally, without exception or hierarchy. Moreover, its mandate and powers must align strictly with constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion or belief and nondiscrimination for all minority citizens.

— Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2 December 2025)

Amid violations of freedom of religion or belief, the period also saw a few developments that must be cautiously acknowledged. These developments require robust follow-up by the government to have a lasting impact.

In December 2025, the National Commission for Minorities Act 2025 was enacted to establish a National Commission for Minorities Rights (NCMR) to ‘safeguard and promote the social, economic, political and legal rights and interests of minorities’. The Act states that the Commission shall have a chairman, two minority members from each province, and one minority member from the federal capital.

Most human rights organisations and members of the minority community interviewed for this study welcomed the legislation. Safdar Chaudhry, a human rights defender, felt that ‘a major portion of minorities’ issues will be settled if the National Commission for Minorities Act, 2025 is implemented in its true spirit’. He added, however, that the Act was enacted essentially to fulfil Pakistan’s international obligations.

After about seven months, some are growing sceptical of its significance. The process of setting up of the commission is still incomplete, and its chairman has not been appointed. Worried it might become another hollow piece of legislation meant to give a semblance of conformity to international obligations, twenty-two minority legislators from federal and provincial assemblies, along with legal experts and civil society representatives, gathered at a forum in May 2026. They urged the government to swiftly operationalise the NCMR by framing [rules](#) that reflect the true spirit of the Act.

In another positive development, following the lead of the federal capital, Balochistan and Punjab passed legislation criminalising child marriage. Balochistan passed the Balochistan Child Marriages Restraint Act 2025 in November 2025, and Punjab passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2026 in May 2026. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the only province that has not adopted such legislation.

In a somewhat hopeful development in March 2026, the Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority approved textbooks for [religious education](#) in schools for students of six minority faiths: Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Kalash, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. There

is little understanding of how these books will be taught to minorities scattered across the province. Surprisingly, Ahmadis are omitted from the list of minorities.

Recommendations

1. The federal government must operationalise the National Commission for Minorities Act 2025, by making sure that the commission is properly constituted, the rules of the Act are framed and chairman and other members appointed as mandated by the Act.
2. Federal and provincial governments must publish disaggregated annual data on FORB-related issues such as blasphemy cases, mob violence incidents, forced conversion complaints, and prison data. This will ensure transparency and credibility of official claims.
3. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should prioritise passing a law setting the minimum marriage age at 18 for both men and women, ensuring uniformity in marriageable age across Pakistan.
4. Prompt action should be taken in accordance with the law against groups or individuals who instigate mobs and incite violence.
5. Law-enforcement and investigative agencies such as the police and Federal Investigation Agency must receive mandatory training in addressing FORB-related offences and upholding Pakistan's commitments under international treaties and conventions.
6. Federal and provincial governments must end discriminatory recruitment practices that confine many minorities to sanitation work.
7. The administrative structure of the Evacuee Trust Property Board, a federal statutory body, should be overhauled to become more transparent, accountable, and representative of minority communities.
8. The federal government should constitute an inquiry commission under Section 3 of the Pakistan Commission of Inquiry Act 2017, to examine the findings of the Special Branch of Punjab Police and the [NCHR](#) (October 2024).
9. Authorities should regularly monitor seminaries linked to conversions and underage marriages. Additionally, any religious conversion must take place in court or in the presence of a government official.
10. Concrete steps should be taken to protect human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists who risk their safety covering FORB-related violations and face harm from criminal elements.
11. Law enforcement agencies must be better prepared to safeguard people and property against mob violence. Police training in intelligence gathering, crowd control, identifying early signs of rioting, and community policing is crucial.
12. Reports have highlighted hardships faced by inmates accused of blasphemy in Pakistan's jails. Authorities should ensure these inmates have access to the same facilities as other prisoners without compromising security.
13. The pattern of hate speech targeting minorities and individuals who do not align with the far-right interpretation of Islam in public spaces must be addressed. The state should enforce

legal action against all incitements to violence, especially on social media, while respecting the right to free speech guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan.

14. Steps should be taken to eliminate corrupt elements from law-enforcement agencies by establishing an efficient mechanism for departmental accountability. Regular assessments of personnel, including physical and mental evaluations, should ensure they can handle the rigours of policing in hostile environments.
15. School curricula should be evaluated and redesigned to combat religious bigotry and foster inclusivity and pluralism.
16. Research centres envisaged under countering violent extremism (CVE) laws in the provinces should be operationalised as soon as possible.
17. Interfaith committees must be more effective and stay active all year, not just before religious events. They should have a visible presence in areas with diverse religious communities and consistently coordinate with local authorities.
18. External pressures from bar associations and religious groups should not be allowed to influence police and district authorities to act against a specific sect or minority.
19. Judicial and executive authorities must enforce the 2014 Supreme Court ruling in its entirety to ensure religious freedoms.
20. Authorities should ensure the safety of all minority worship sites and immediately reopen all Ahmadi places of worship shut down due to alleged threats to public order.
21. Given the seriousness of a blasphemy charge, investigations should be carried out by higher-ranking officials in accordance with the PPC Section 295-C.
22. A public awareness campaign educating people about sensitive laws involving capital punishment and how entrapment works, especially in the digital age, should be thoroughly carried out. Additionally, the public should be kept informed about evolving cyber laws.
23. Mainstream media should have the freedom to fulfil their responsibility to all segments of society, especially marginalised groups.
24. As recommended consistently by HRCP, no place of worship should be demolished unless a court issues a clear order after hearing both sides. Anyone attempting to vandalise a place of worship should face legal prosecution.