

PUNJAB





- Political uncertainty prevailed throughout the year as people's democratic rights were infringed upon, in a relentless fight between the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N), Pakistan Muslim League (Q) (PML-Q) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for the office of Punjab chief minister.
- The Punjab assembly sessions were irregular and marred by disorder in the fourth parliamentary year (2021-22). Of the four provincial assemblies in the country, the Punjab assembly met for the lowest number of working hours and sittings in the year.
- After a tussle between the government and opposition for a new local government law, the Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September.
- There was an uptick in the incidence of gang-rape, murder, acid crimes and police encounters in 2022 relative to 2021.
- Media-persons faced harassment and arrest if they dared criticise the state. The arrest of journalist Imran Riaz Khan and unwarranted interrogation of Steven Butler (of the Committee to Protect Journalists) at the Lahore airport illustrate the point.
- The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reported receiving 57 cases of enforced disappearance from Punjab in 2022.
- Attacks on the Ahmadiyya community's right to life and freedom of worship were common, with at least three members of the community killed in faith-based violence.
- The acquittal of Qandeel Baloch's brother triggered a debate on problems in the law pertaining to honour killings and the need to make such crimes a non-pardonable offence.
- The labour system remained rigged against the poor, with workers increasingly discontent with wage structures and delays in disbursement of salaries.
- Transgender persons experienced considerable discrimination and violence. An intense public debate ensued on whether the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 was in accordance with Islamic provisions after the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) moved the Federal Shariat Court against the act.
- The Punjab government failed to protect people's right to a clean, safe and healthy environment. The effects of this neglect were evident from the devastating floods that swept through southern Punjab in August and the smog that enveloped Lahore in November.

- Schools have been unable to resume an uninterrupted routine since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 due to fresh problems in the shape of floods and smog.
- The Punjab government banned the Oscar-shortlisted film *Joyland*, whose story revolved around a trans woman, from being shown in the province.



Divisive politics and devastating floods made the year 2022 long and arduous in Punjab. After PTI chief Imran Khan was ousted as Pakistan's prime minister, after having lost a vote of no confidence on 10 April, Punjab's politics became mired in successive political and constitutional crises. The province became a battlefield for the position of Punjab chief minister, leading to successive changes in office – from Usman Buzdar (PTI) to Hamza Shahbaz (PML-N) to Parvez Elahi (PML-Q) – and disorder in the Punjab Assembly April onwards. Political and economic governance was the main casualty. The province remained without a local government all year after the previous local government's term expired on 1 January. Civil servants were transferred frequently and prematurely.

People expressed considerable frustration at the government's seeming inability to solve their problems. Protests against inflation, job insecurity and wage regularisation were common. The government failed to protect the rights of religious minorities: attacks on the Ahmadiyya community and their graveyards and sites of worship continued unchecked. The government also attempted to curb freedom of expression through repeated arrests and the unwarranted interrogation of media persons.

While centres of power in Punjab reeled under the impact of the political and economic turmoil, heavy monsoon rains in August devastated the southern districts of Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur and Mianwali. Lives were lost and homes destroyed or damaged, while the destruction of road networks, schools and marketplaces meant that people were deprived of their livelihoods and free movement. Women seeking shelter in relief camps reported instances of physical and sexual harassment. It was not possible to get a clear picture of the extent of relief and rehabilitation fund set aside for flood victims, as figures pledged by the chief minister changed with successive news reports. By September, people in Rajanpur were compelled to return home on foot because they could no longer live in poorly facilitated relief camps.



Laws and law-making

Unruly assembly sessions. The Punjab assembly sessions were irregular and rowdy in the fourth parliamentary year (2021–22), and the average number of working hours per sitting stood at one hour and 49 minutes. The Comparative Assessment of Performance of Provincial Assemblies compiled by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) shows the Punjab Assembly met for the lowest number of working hours (76.31 working hours) and sittings (41 sittings) among provincial assemblies during the parliamentary year 2021–22.¹ The report found that the assembly’s shortest sitting was only six minutes long on 27 July and the longest lasted seven hours and 42 minutes on 29 July. The report further points out that the three Punjab chief ministers—Usman Buzdar, Hamza Shahbaz and Parvez Elahi— together attended 21 percent of the Punjab assembly sittings; a quorum was stressed in five sittings, out of which two sittings were adjourned due to lack of quorum.

The atmosphere of the assembly remained hostile mainly due to tension between the PTI and PML-N, so much so that the budget session had to be held at the Aiwan-i-Iqbal Complex on 22 June for the presentation of the province’s annual budget for 2022/23 and supplementary budget for 2021/22.

The Punjab Assembly was in a state of unrest as violence broke out inside the assembly during the election for the post of chief minister on 16 April. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed outrage at this outbreak of violence, tweeting that ‘it was an affront to democracy, decency and the decorum that voters expect from the people



Violence broke out inside the Punjab Assembly during the election for the post of chief minister on 16 April.

they elect.’ This delayed the budget session as the opposition parties, the PTI and PML-Q, demanded an apology from the inspector general of police and the chief secretary for the violence.

To end the standoff and facilitate the passage of the annual budget, Governor Balighur Rehman promulgated the Punjab Laws (Repealing and Removal of Difficulties) Ordinance 2022, curbing the speaker’s powers (Parvez Elahi at the time) and empowering the Punjab law and parliamentary affairs department to issue notifications regarding the summoning or proroguing of the provincial assembly.

Bills passed. According to PILDAT, a total of 35 bills were passed in the year. In September, the assembly passed the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Bill 2022, the Lahore Central Business District Development Authority Amendment Bill 2022, and the Ravi Urban Development Authority Amendment Bill 2022. These bills had earlier been rejected by the governor and sent back to the assembly secretariat. The Punjab Assembly also passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September after repealing the Local Government Act 2022. *See also Local government*

Administration of justice

Cases pending. In a full court meeting presided over by Chief Justice Muhammad Ameer Bhatti on 7 September, it was disclosed that the Lahore High Court (LHC) disposed of nearly 95,762 cases between January and July 2022. As many as 53,955 cases were decided at the principal seat in Lahore, 24,174 in Multan, 11,221 in Bahawalpur and 6,412 at the Rawalpindi bench. The district judiciary decided over 1.6 million cases in the same period, of which the sessions courts decided 40,000 cases while the civil and magisterial courts adjudicated over 1.2 million cases. Nearly 1.16 million new cases were instituted in the civil and sessions courts.

Key court rulings. At the start of the year, on 8 January, the LHC ruled that a marriage without completing *iddat* [a period spanning about four months after separation between a married Muslim couple or death of the husband] is not void and does not constitute the cognisable offence of *zina* [adultery].² The LHC also gave an important ruling that disallowed individuals from inciting the public to raise funds for *jihad* [holy war] in an Islamic state and dismissed the appeals of two men who had been convicted for raising funds for the proscribed militant outfit, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, on 27 January.³

On 10 February, the LHC ruled that a presidential form of government is against the basic structure of the Constitution.⁴ Subsequently, hearing petitions on the persistent constitutional deadlock in the Punjab Assembly, the LHC ruled on 22 April that the governor could not refuse to swear in a newly elected chief minister and expected that the president would nominate any person to administer oath to the PML-N leader

without delay. On 28 April, the LHC advised the Punjab governor to ensure the process was completed and oath administered to the elected chief minister, Hamza Shahbaz, either himself or through his nominee under Article 255 of the Constitution on or before 28 April.⁵ On 30 June, the LHC ordered the recounting of votes for the election of Punjab's chief minister, held on 16 April, excluding the 25 votes of defecting PTI lawmakers.⁶



Law and order

Crime statistics. In comparing data on the number and nature of crimes committed in 2021 and 2022, it is evident that incidents of gang-rape increased from 269 in 2021 to 311 in 2022, murder from 4,379 in 2021 to 4,596 in 2022, acid crimes from 34 in 2021 to 59 in 2022, and police encounters from 294 in 2021 to 370 in 2022 (Table 1). Other crimes such as rape, honour killings and domestic violence show a marginal decrease. HRCP’s own data, based on media reports, indicates at least 69 instances of police excesses (in custody as well as in public places).

Table 1: Crime statistics for Punjab in 2022

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	3,656
Gang-rape	311
Murder	4,596
Honour killings	183
Domestic violence against women	695
Acid crimes	59
Blasphemy cases	11
Law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty	12
Police encounters	370

Source: Punjab Police, in response to HRCP’s request for information

Frequent and premature transfers of police officials. In August, the inspector general of police transferred 55 superintendents and deputy superintendents of police. It was alleged that the move was politically motivated. A similar pattern of transfers continued throughout the year.⁷

Jails and prisoners

Statistics from the Punjab Home Department for May showed that the 42 functional jails across the province have a holding capacity of 36,806 prisoners and detainees, as against an inmate population of 50,789—a record 38 percent more than capacity.⁸

The Provincial Intelligence Centre noted malpractice and corruption in Adiala Jail in its report to the chief minister and inspector general of prisons.⁹ The report expressed serious concerns related to overcrowding¹⁰ and a prevailing culture of bribery. According to the report, about 700 convicted prisoners were brought to the jail factory for labour daily, of

which 200 were exempted from labour through bribes of up to PKR 5,000 each. The report also notes that prisoners are forced to resort to bribery to avail basic facilities such as healthcare. There were also reported cases of prisoners tortured to death in jails in Faisalabad¹¹ and Bahawalpur.¹²

Enforced disappearances

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) reported receiving 57 cases of enforced disappearance from Punjab in 2022. The official data indicates that, since the COIED's inception in 2011, of 1,551 cases received as of end-December 2022, 772 persons had returned home, 91 were traced to internment centres and 172 to prisons, while 68 dead bodies were located over the course of 11 years. At the end of the year, the COIED still had a balance of 257 cases of enforced disappearance from the province.

Activists demanded the release of missing persons during the Asma Jahangir Conference in Lahore on 24 October. At the conference, Pashtun Tahafuz Movement chief Manzoor Pashteen alleged that national institutions were behind extrajudicial killings in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas under a policy of 'state of exceptions'.¹³ He also pointed to the helplessness of the courts, parliament, media and civil society, given that Ali Wazir, a member of the National Assembly, had continuously been denied a court production order. Mr Pashteen was subsequently booked on charges of terrorism on 25 October.

Death penalty

While no executions are reported to have taken place in Punjab in 2022, the death penalty was handed down in 61 cases during the year, according to HRCP's own data, based on media reports.

Freedom of movement

The government set up a number of relief camps mainly in Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur in South Punjab to provide shelter to people whose homes, crops and livestock had been swept away by the July/August floods. The destruction of infrastructure—houses, schools, healthcare facilities, roads and bridges—constrained the movement of not just residents, but also humanitarian workers. The movement of women and children was particularly impacted because of threats of sexual and physical harassment and concerns of *pardah* [segregation]. Many found they could not freely access toilets, healthcare facilities and humanitarian aid. The movement of pregnant and lactating women was particularly restricted in the affected districts.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Interfaith harmony. In the name of religious harmony, the government welcomed Hindu and Sikh devotees at Wagah and Kartarpur during the year. Thousands of Sikh pilgrims crossed the India-Pakistan border to attend Baisakhi in April, the Jorr Mela in June and Ranjit Singh's death anniversary again in June at the Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal. The Rakhi festival was celebrated at the same gurdwara after a gap of two years; it had been discontinued earlier due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Special arrangements were made to celebrate Diwali to express solidarity with Lahore's Hindu community in October.

The government of Punjab also assigned the Walled City of Lahore Authority to conserve churches, temples and shrines in Lahore. Work on the restoration of the Jain Mandir was initiated.



The Rakhi festival was celebrated at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal after a gap of two years.

Persecution of Ahmadiyya community. Well intentioned and necessary as these efforts may be, the same level of enthusiasm was not evident with respect to all religious minorities living in Punjab. A seminary student, Hafiz Ali Raza, stabbed 33-year-old Ahmadi Abdul Salam to death in Okara in May.¹⁴ A 60-year-old Ahmadi man, Naseer Ahmad, was stabbed to death by an unidentified man over ‘religious differences’ in Chenabnagar in August.¹⁵ A case against five Ahmadis on charges of ‘hurting the sentiments of Muslims’ by having performed ritual animal sacrifices on Eid was registered in Faisalabad on 13 July. According to information provided by the Anjuman-e-Ahmadiyya, 105 cases were registered against Ahmadis in the year.

An HRCF fact-finding mission observed an upsurge in the persecution of members of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya in Punjab—especially in Gujranwala and Wazirabad—during 2022. Crimes against the community included the desecration of graves, destruction of minarets at sites of worship, first information reports filed against community members for carrying out ritual animal sacrifice on Eid, the forcible removal of Quranic verses from houses belonging to members of the community, and faith-based murders.

The mission found that, on 12 December, the district administration removed the minarets atop an Ahmadiyya *bait-ul-zikr* [place of worship] in Gujranwala’s Baghbanpura area, after receiving complaints from local religious outfits. Earlier, in July, a few days before Eid-ul-Azha, police officials (accompanied by two local residents) desecrated 53 graves of members of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya in Talwandi Khajoorwali—the fourth such incident in the city in that year alone (see also Table 2).

Table 2: Human rights violations against the Ahmadiyya community in 2022

Number of Ahmadis target-killed	3
Number of Ahmadis assaulted for their faith	7
Number of Ahmadiyya worship places sealed by the authorities	1
Number of Ahmadiyya worship places set on fire or damaged	10
Burial of Ahmadis denied in common cemeteries	4
Ahmadi graves desecrated and damaged	92
Number of cases in which the <i>kalma</i> was removed from Ahmadi homes, shops and worship places	6

Source: Press Section, Anjuman-e-Ahmadiyya

Minorities in South Punjab. Another HRCF fact-finding mission found serious violations of the rights of minorities in South Punjab, observing that the blasphemy laws were commonly used to intimidate Hindu and Christian families for purposes of land grabbing. The report said that forced conversions remained common: in one case, a landlord had forcibly married the daughter of a Hindu tenant.¹⁶

Changes to marriage certificates. The Punjab Local Government and Community Development Department updated Form-II of the standard *nikahnama* [marriage registration certificate] on 31 July to incorporate a mandatory declaration of belief in the concept of *khatam-e-nabuwat* [finality of prophethood]. HRCP strongly opposed this move, tweeting that ‘such a declaration is already mandatory when acquiring identity documents and should not be necessary at this stage.’ Human rights observers felt that the provision pandered to the right wing and could be used to incite violence against religious minorities, and specifically the Ahmadiyya community, if misused.

Freedom of expression

Curbs on the media. Media-persons lived and worked in fear for yet another year, contending with harassment and arrests if they dared criticise the state. Anchor Imran Riaz Khan was charged for abetment of mutiny and criticism of state institutions by private persons from different parts of the province, and arrested from the outskirts of Islamabad on 5 July. Condemning the arrest, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said: ‘As the number of cases lodged against journalists increases in Pakistan, the IFJ urges the Pakistani authorities to withdraw the cases against Imran Riaz Khan and cease the use of government mechanisms to harass journalists and media workers.’

In another disturbing incident in October, Steven Butler, the Asia program coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists, was detained by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and interrogated at the airport in Lahore. Butler had been invited to attend the Asma Jahangir Conference being held in the city.

Hate speech. Geospatial data collected by the Minority Rights Group International unearthed some worrying realities about sources of hate speech in Pakistan. It found that the bulk of hate speech occurs in three cities: Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi.¹⁷ The organisation’s report said stated: ‘In most cases, Lahore and Rawalpindi, the two large cities in Punjab province, together have contributed around 45–50% of the entire hate speech output. Moreover, if the volume of hate speech originating from other smaller cities of Punjab, including Sialkot, Multan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat and Bahawalpur are also factored in, it reaches up to 60% in some cases.’¹⁸

Freedom of assembly

PTI ‘Azadi’ March. After former prime minister Imran Khan was removed from office in April, after losing a vote of no-confidence in Parliament, PTI supporters gathered in parts of Punjab as part of a long march to Islamabad to demand the removal of the government. Clashes occurred between protestors and law enforcement personnel as police fired tear gas in several districts as PTI supporters tried to remove

roadblocks on highways leading to Islamabad.irate protesters pelted stones and threw tear gas shells back at the police before scores of them were taken into custody.¹⁹



Clashes occurred between PTI protestors and law enforcement personnel as police fired tear gas.

After the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified Imran Khan in the Toshakhana reference on 21 October, thousands of PTI supporters blocked roads and burnt tyres in cities of Punjab. Khan launched his 'Haqeeqi Azadi March' to Islamabad from Lahore on 29 October, delivering a fiery speech targeting the intelligence agencies. The following day, a female journalist, Sadaf Naeem, was crushed under a container truck near Kamoke.

Sit-ins by students and teachers. During the first quarter of 2022, school, college and university teachers took to the streets of Lahore and boycotted certain classes for over a month to demand service and pay protection. The protests came at the cost of students' education. In February, hundreds of teachers of the Basic Education Community School – from far-flung areas of the province – demonstrated in front of the Punjab Assembly to urge the government to regularise their service and fix their salaries under the provincial labour laws.

In March, teachers of public colleges in Punjab, alongside representatives of the Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association, Young Lecturers Association and Nawa-i-Asataza office-bearers, protested in Lahore. They alleged that around 7,000 college teachers had been affected by the policies of the government and were facing a substantial PKR 20,000 pay cut.²⁰ On 13 April, the thirty-seventh day of the protest, police forcibly entered the protestors' camp and asked them to leave. They took some teachers into custody and removed the camp. Subsequently, on 3 August, the police baton-charged teachers and clerks demonstrating in Rawalpindi against the appointment of the chief executive officer of the District Education Department.

Student protests. On 9 February, the Progressive Students' Collective demonstrated in Lahore for the restoration of student unions, reduction in fees and withdrawal of security forces from college campuses. On 18 October, hundreds of students from the Pashtun and Baloch Councils of Punjab University protested against the police and administration for arresting Riaz Khan, president of the Pashtun Educational Development Movement, from his hostel; they demanded his immediate release. Their other demands included not allowing the police to enter the campus, action against Islami Jamiat Tulba (IJT) activists for allegedly opening fire in the presence of the police, and the harassment and racial profiling of Pashtun and Baloch students.

Health workers' rights. Lady health workers and volunteers from Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur took to the streets in Taunsa Sharif on 14 February to demand their reinstatement. Subsequently, they demonstrated in Bahawalpur on 15 May to protest against delays in payment of their honorariums. Despite their frequent protests, the government has appeared to ignore their demands.

Inflation protests. Thousands of people marched against the high cost of living and unemployment. Lahore saw workers stage a rally organised by the All Pakistan WAPDA Hydroelectric Workers Union on 2 July and 22 September and by the All Pakistan Workers Confederation on 26 July. Similarly, people blocked the roads in Toba Tek Singh to protest against inflated domestic and commercial electricity bills on 16 August. The Jamaat-e-Islami also assembled in Lahore on 18 August against the increase in power tariffs and inclusion of various taxes in people's electricity bills.

Illegal possession of Ravi land. Throughout the year, landowners and farmers protested against the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project over the forced possession of their farmland allegedly by the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) for the development of a mega-city on the outskirts of Lahore. The protests gained momentum October onwards. One such protest was held on 21 September, with protestors claiming that the land acquisition process contravened the decision of the Supreme Court.²¹ The authorities, however, denied this claim.

Political participation

By-elections. By-elections were held on 17 July to the seats that had been vacated after the disqualification of defecting PTI members who had voted for the PML-N's Hamza Shahbaz as chief minister. The PTI managed to win 15 out of 20 seats.

A positive outcome of the by-elections was the record 49.7 percent voter turnout. According to data compiled by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) from 638 polling stations in 20 constituencies, the number of contestants in the hotly contested elections dropped from 234

candidates (226 men and eight women) in the 2018 general elections to 175 candidates (170 men and five women) in the 2022 by-elections. Subsequently, by-elections were held on 16 October to eight National Assembly and three Punjab Assembly seats, of which the PTI won six National Assembly seats and two in the Punjab Assembly.

Transfers of civil servants. The federal and Punjab governments were unable to reach a consensus on the appointment of civil servants. Frequent and premature transfers of bureaucrats were common throughout the year. Bureaucrats and police officers worked under political pressure, with some officers preferring to opt for long leave.²²



Local government

After a long, intense tussle between the government and opposition for a new local government law for the most part of 2022, the Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September after repealing the Local Government Act 2022, which had been passed by the Hamza Shahbaz government on 24 June.

Uncertainty over the law and disruptions in the functioning of the provincial assembly prevented the local government elections from taking place on time. Ultimately, on 30 November, the ECP announced it would hold local government elections in Punjab in April 2023. The term of the previous local government had expired on 1 January.²³ Later, on 11 December, the ECP also issued a schedule for the delimitation of constituencies for the local government elections.²⁴

Shrinking spaces and role of assemblies

Punjab became a political battlefield for the mainstream parties, including the PML-N, PML-Q and PTI. Political instability reached fever pitch after Imran Khan was ousted from power in a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly on 10 April. Thereafter, Punjab became mired in crises with the PML-N's Hamza Shahbaz and the PML-Q's Parvez Elahi both vying for the chief minister's office. The assembly proceedings were marred by confidence votes, the chief minister elections, bids to dissolve the assembly, sloganeering and hooliganism, with little, if any, constructive debate and critical legislation. The courts had to intervene to settle the constitutional emergencies (see Table 3).

Table 3: Timeline of developments in the Punjab Assembly

28 Mar	No-trust motion submitted against Chief Minister Usman Buzdar
31 Mar	Chief Minister Usman Buzdar resigns
16 Apr	Vote of no confidence succeeds against Usman Buzdar and Hamza Shahbaz elected chief minister
17 May	Interpreting Article 63-A of the Constitution, the Supreme Court decides that defecting lawmakers' votes will not be counted
20 May	Election Commission of Pakistan de-seats 25 dissenting PTI Punjab Assembly members
30 Jun	LHC orders recounting of votes for chief minister election, excluding PTI dissenters

1 Jul	Supreme Court orders re-election of chief minister on 22 July after holding by-elections to 20 vacant seats
17 Jul	By-election held in Punjab for 20 vacant seats
22 Jul	Hamza Shahbaz re-elected chief minister. Deputy Speaker Dost Mohammad Mazari excludes 10 votes of the PML-Q.
26 Jul	Supreme Court sets aside ruling of Deputy Speaker Dost Mohammad Mazari and declares Chaudhry Parvez Elahi chief minister
19 Dec	Opposition parties submit no-confidence motion against Chief Minister Parvez Elahi
20 Dec	Governor Balighur Rehman directs Chief Minister Parvez Elahi to take a vote of confidence

Source: PILDAT.



Women

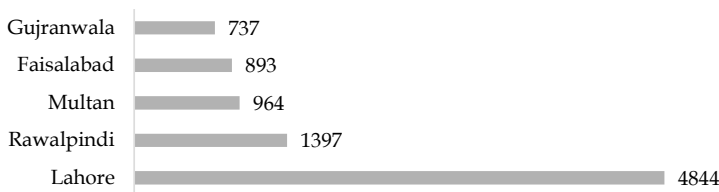
Gender-based violence. The record maintained by the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women of incidents reported through its 1043 helpline indicate a depressingly high incidence of gender-based violence (Table 4 and Figure 1).

Table 4: Gender-based violence reported by Punjab women’s helpline in 2022

Period	Family issues	Criminal offences	Property matters including inherited property	Harassment	Violence and torture, including domestic violence	Other general matters related to women’s issues	Total calls
Jan-Mar	448	160	706	1,053	1,256	2,582	6,205
Apr-Jun	376	128	455	1,054	1,127	2,941	6,081
Jul-Sep	370	118	409	894	1,201	2,124	5,116
Oct-Dec	324	201	1,159	535	1,215	2,210	5,643
Total	1,518	607	2,729	3,536	4,799	9,857	23,046

Source: Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

Figure 1: Analysis of Punjab women’s helpline calls, top five districts



Source: Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

Forced marriage. Two Spanish sisters of Pakistani origin – Arooj Abbas and Aneesa Abbas – were horrifically murdered in Gujrat in May for bringing ‘shame’ to their family: they had taken a stand against forced marriages to their cousins. The police booked six suspects, including their brother and cousin.²⁵

Qandeel Baloch case. A compromise was reached in the high-profile case involving the honour killing of social media star Qandeel Baloch.

Her brother, Muhammed Waseem, accused of murdering his sister in 2016, walked out of jail free on 14 February after his parents forgave him of the crime. The verdict initiated an important debate on the inherent problems in punishing honour killings as opposed to murder and the need to make honour killings a non-pardonable offence such that relatives cannot forgive the culprit.



Muhammed Waseem, accused of murdering his sister Qandeel Baloch, walked out of jail free on 14 February after his parents forgave him of the crime.

Incidence of rape. Cases of rape continued to be reported through the year, including the gang-rape of a pregnant woman in Jhelum in June,²⁶ and two cases involving men who raped their daughters in Muzaffargarh in June and in Divalpur in September.²⁷ However, the level of prosecution and investigation of rape incidents remained low, with 3,656 rapes reported to the police.

Acid crimes. The year also saw an alarming reverse on the progress made to eliminate acid crimes. Saima Akhtar, a 24-year-old woman, suffered serious burns when a man named Nauman threw acid on her on the street in a village near Vehari in January.²⁸

Nasreen Bibi and her 12-year-old son Jahanzeb, who were burnt in an acid attack, died at Multan's Nishtar Hospital in May.²⁹ A woman in Lahore, Abida, and her minor daughter Tania succumbed to injuries sustained in an acid attack at Mayo Hospital in June.³⁰

Women in flood-affected areas. Thousands of women endured poor living conditions after the devastating monsoon of 2022. Based on research by the Population Council in flood-hit districts of Punjab, some

110,000 pregnant women required antenatal, delivery and post-natal care.³¹ Although the government and nongovernment organisations sought to provide free medical help to women in such cases, many of their needs could not be met, such as hygiene requirements.

Women in South Punjab. Following a fact-finding mission to South Punjab in March, HRCP noted that ‘women in the tribal areas of Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur remain subject to harmful customary practices, with *karo-kari* and *wani* still entrenched in the fabric of their society – to the extent that even the Border Military Police does not provide the protection that victims are entitled to.’ The mission also found that many women were denied the right to citizenship documents by male members of their families and, as a result, had no political voice.³²

Right to maternity leave. On a positive note, on 2 April, the LHC ruled that availing maternity leave was a fundamental right of a woman even if not provided for in the terms and conditions of her service contract.³³ The case was filed by Sobia Nazir, a teacher who was denied maternity leave by her employers at the Punjab Workers Welfare School (Girls) Warburton in district Nankana Sahib. The judgment cited Article 35 of the Constitution, which provides that the state ‘shall protect the marriage, the family, the mother and the child.’

Transgender persons

Transgender individuals continued to face sexual and physical violence throughout the year, such as in the case of Nadeem (alias Bunty), who was stabbed to death after being sexually assaulted in Taxila on 11 February. In another case, the body of an unidentified transgender person was found on an empty plot near Muzaffargarh on 28 April; another transgender person was sexually abused in Rawalpindi on 9 August. Similar incidents were reported from different parts of the province and trans rights to life, health and physical integrity continued to be violated.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. The Federal Shariat Court started hearing a petition filed for the review of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 on 21 September. The Act gives transgender people in Pakistan the right to choose their gender identity as they perceive it and to change it on previously issued government documents. After four years of the Act, an intense debate was sparked by the Jamaat-e-Islami on whether the provisions of the Act were in accordance with Islamic principles.

Across the province, clerics claimed that the law was an attempt to legalise homosexuality in the country. In an interview with Voice of America, Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan of the Jamaat-e-Islami said the law should only encompass those who cannot be categorised as male or female at birth, based on their sexual or reproductive anatomy. He proposed amendments to the 2018 law, which include establishing

medical boards that conduct detailed exams and then advise the person what their gender should be. Trans rights activists have opposed examination by medical boards to determine their gender identity and trans rights activist Zanaya Chaudhary has termed this 'discriminatory' to the transgender community.

Schools for transgender community. On a positive note, the South Punjab Education Department opened a school for the transgender community in Bahawalpur on 12 March and in Dera Ghazi Khan on 1 August. The aim was to educate transgender students to allow them to earn a decent livelihood. The first transgender school was inaugurated in Lahore on 8 December.³⁴



The South Punjab Education Department opened schools for the transgender community in Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Lahore.

Children

Child abuse. Some 4,503 cases of child abuse were reported in Punjab between January and October 2022, according to the Sustainable Social Development Organisation, with 27 percent of all cases occurring in Lahore, implying that over one in four cases occurred in only one of the 36 districts of Punjab.

Districts such as Jhelum, Chakwal, Mianwali, Narowal and Khushab were 'among those with the lowest prevalence of violence against women and children,' the report states (Table 5).

Table 5: Incidence of child abuse in Punjab (January to October 2022)

No.	District	No. of cases of child abuse	No.	District	No. of cases of child abuse
1.	Lahore	1,221	19.	Bahawalnagar	79
2.	Faisalabad	290	20.	Sargodha	77
3.	Sheikhupura	204	21.	Chiniot	70
4.	Kasur	181	22.	Lodhran	66
5.	Gujranwala	177	23.	Gujrat	62
6.	Rawalpindi	154	24.	Layyah	59
7.	Muzaffargarh	154	25.	Mandi Bahauddin	59
8.	Multan	151	26.	Nankana	53
9.	Rahimyar Khan	137	27.	Attock	53
10.	Sialkot	130	28.	Pakpattan	52
11.	Vehari	118	29.	Sahiwal	52
12.	Khanewal	111	30.	Jhelum	49
13.	Dera Ghazi Khan	109	31.	Mianwali	38
14.	Bahawalpur	101	32.	Jhang	38
15.	Okara	94	33.	Chakwal	33
16.	Rajanpur	84	34.	Bhakkar	24
17.	Toba Tek Singh	81	35.	Narowal	20
18.	Hafizabad	81	36.	Khushab	18
Total				4,503	

Source: Sustainable Social Development Organisation.

Based on cases reported in the media, the nature of crimes against children included rape, including that of girls living with disabilities, gang-rape, abduction, corporal punishment, physical violence perpetrated by employers against child domestic helpers, and the sexual abuse of students by seminary teachers. Incidents of parents or stepparents torturing children were commonly reported throughout the year. A three-year-old girl was killed by her father in Lala Musa on 9 August for insisting on meeting her mother, who had been divorced by the father a year ago.³⁵ Similarly, a seminary teacher was arrested for burning two students with a hot pan because he suspected them of having stolen PKR 200 in Basti Bhora near Bahawalnagar on 27 September.³⁶

Child labour. The Punjab government failed to protect children from forced labour, especially from engaging in domestic labour. The parents of nine-year-old Maria Bibi handed over their daughter to a couple for employment as domestic help against a salary of PKR 2,000 per month in 2021. Subsequently, in October 2022, she was recovered from a house in Faisalabad where she had been kept in chains to prevent her from running away.³⁷

Labour

Wages and salaries. Protests against low wages, regularisation of service and delays in salaries were routine in 2022. During a sit-in outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore in March, the All Government Employees Grand Alliance—alongside other government employees’ associations of clerks and lady health workers—presented a charter of demands to the Punjab government for the implementation of a disparity reduction allowance and service protection. Similarly, employees of Punjab University staged a demonstration to demand a 25 percent disparity reduction allowance for employees from grades BS-1 to BS-22 without any discrimination.

Workers came out onto the streets to protest against the nonpayment of salaries. In April, the Kamalia Municipal Committee sanitation workers protested in Toba Tek Singh, as did around 2,000 employees of the Punjab Mass-Transit Authority. Scores of industrial workers also staged a rally organised by the Labour Qaumi Movement and Haqooq-e-Khalq Party in Faisalabad’s Saddar area on 24 June to demand an increase in the minimum wage to PKR 40,000 and provision of basic health and education facilities.³⁸

Farmers affected by the floods. The floods disrupted agricultural production, which affected the low-paid labour force. Hundreds of farmers were left destitute after they lost their crop. Some 0.7 million acres of agricultural land was affected by the floods in Punjab.³⁹

Bonded labour. An HRCP fact-finding mission to South Punjab in March raised concerns over serious labour rights violations, particularly in terms of dysfunctional district vigilance committees set up to monitor and report the use of bonded labour. HRCP also condemned the restoration of the *peshgi* [debt bondage] system by the Punjab government, amending the Punjab Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992. HRCP noted an allegation by power loom workers that they were compelled to work 16-hour days and had no recourse to social security or compensation in case of accidental death or injury, nor did they receive the minimum wage.

In June, brick kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh protested against unfair wages of PKR 700 instead of the PKR 1,250 against 1,000 bricks determined in a government notification.⁴⁰ Brick kiln workers also faced distressing circumstances after torrential rains submerged kilns in Rajanpur, making it impossible for them to find work.⁴¹

Occupational health and safety. Protection for workers remained well below accepted standards of safety. Shockingly, two sanitation workers were asphyxiated while working without proper safety gear in a manhole in the Rohilanwali area near Muzaffargarh on 14 July.



Education

School closures. Schools have not been able to resume regular routines since being interrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. In flood-hit South Punjab, children lost family, safety and access to education. Although an exact number is not available for schoolchildren affected by the floods or the effects of the floods on school infrastructure, their learning and psychological and physical wellbeing is believed to have been severely impacted.

The LHC directed private and public school administrations to follow a four-day week due to the toxic air quality in Lahore and its surrounding areas on 8 December.⁴² Later, on 27 December, a week-long extension in the winter holidays was given to schools and colleges in Lahore due to the unrelenting smog.⁴³

Poor learning outcomes. UNICEF made startling revelations about school education in Punjab, such as the primary completion rate, which stands at 66 percent. Notable differences were observed along urban-rural as well as socioeconomic lines. Overall, 36 percent of children aged 7 to 14 have foundational reading skills and 12 percent of children aged 7 to 14 have foundational numeracy skills. Only 46 percent of those whose highest level of education is primary were able to read short, simple statements. The UNICEF report's observations on out-of-school children are alarming. The report states that, 'In Punjab, 13 percent of children of age to go to primary school are out of school. At the middle school level, the percentage of out-of-school children increases to 21 percent, and at the junior and senior secondary level it increases to 34 and 47 percent of children.'⁴⁴

Lack of facilities. In Lahore, the Punjab School Education Department failed to install water filtration plants at 100 schools in Lahore despite allocation of funds worth PKR 50 million in last year's budget. There was no clean drinking water in public schools and students were compelled to drink contaminated tap water.⁴⁵

Single National Curriculum. Confusion around the PTI-initiated Single National Curriculum (SNC) persisted for a second year. In March, the Punjab government distributed SNC textbooks to primary students and administrations of 500 *madrassahs* [seminaries]. The Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board decided to roll back the SNC in grades 6–8 and Islamiyat for grade 9 in schools of the province in May.

Violence on campus. Violence continued on campuses as the police arrested 40 students associated with the IJT for obstructing examinations, damaging property and injuring fellow students in January.⁴⁶ Government College University students protested against the administration over a student who had been thrashed allegedly for

sitting with a female classmate on campus. Later, the proctor who had thrashed the student was suspended.⁴⁷ As many as 21 students were critically injured when two groups clashed at the Punjab University campus in March after the IJT objected to a girl and boy sitting together.⁴⁸

Demand for student unions. In February, the Progressive Students Collective staged a sit-in in Lahore, demanding the restoration of student unions and reduction in fees at all educational institutions in the province on the thirty-seventh anniversary of the ban on student unions. They also demanded the release of all student activists and teachers subjected to enforced disappearances all over the country—including students Sohail Baloch and Faseeh Baloch from Quetta—and the withdrawal of the Rangers and Frontier Constabulary from all campuses. Students from Pakpattan demanded the construction of Baba Farid University, which the government had earlier promised.⁴⁹

Administrative issues. The University of Engineering and Technology functioned without any appointed heads, following which candidates were appointed by the vice-chancellor amid allegations of lack of due process. These interim appointments have had a negative impact on the functioning of the university.⁵⁰ In Lahore, the All Pakistan Universities BPS Teachers Association demanded that the Higher Education Commission provide a service structure for appointment and promotions of BPS faculty. They held press conferences and protests in front of the Punjab Assembly in February but to no avail.⁵¹

In March, teachers of public colleges in Punjab staged a sit-in outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore to demand the regularisation of their service and withdrawal of pay cuts. However, no one from the government side, including the Higher Education Department, approached the teachers for a dialogue.⁵² In April, the Punjab government barred schoolteachers from using social networking platforms and directed them to stay away from the ongoing ‘smear campaign’ against state institutions and to refrain from siding with any political party.⁵³ Additionally, the vice-chancellors of public sector universities expressed concern over drastic cuts in the higher education budget for 2022/23.⁵⁴

Health

Covid-19. The fifth wave of Covid-19 raged on at the start of the year. On 20 January, Lahore reported a Covid-19 positivity rate of 15.2 percent, with 10.3 percent in Rawalpindi.⁵⁵ An increase in the positivity rate was reported from other parts of Punjab as well. A surge in cases of Covid-19 was observed five months later when Punjab reported 55 new cases in one day on 29 June. One death was also reported the same day.

Leprosy. Shockingly, leprosy—which was thought to have been eliminated—re-emerged in Punjab in 2022. Eighteen women and children of the Mirkhani (a sub-clan of the Buzdar tribe) in Jhandi Tuman Buzdar developed this condition due to extreme poverty and lack of adequate nutrition and potable water.⁵⁶

Hepatitis. On 10 March, a report prepared by the Planning and Development Board of the Punjab government on the prevention and control of hepatitis in Punjab exposed the failure of strategies to save Punjab from this life-threatening virus. The report covered the government's performance for the last four years (2017–2021). It observed a high percentage of patient-dropout in Punjab, which had increased the likelihood of transmission of Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B, putting millions of healthy people at risk.

Dengue. October proved to be the worst month for dengue. On 26 October, the Punjab Health Department disclosed that some 293 cases of dengue had been observed in a day.⁵⁷ By the end of November, the Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department confirmed at least 14,882 patients of dengue in all districts of Punjab during 2022.

Shortage of Panadol. A shortage of Panadol, an over-the-counter drug commonly prescribed to relieve pain and fever, was reported on 30 August. Many health experts speculated that the shortage was either caused by the resurgence in cases of dengue and Covid-19 or by the black market creating an artificial shortage. An official of the health department reportedly said the drug had disappeared from Punjab's local markets due to the nonavailability of raw materials in international markets and the low price of the medicine, which was difficult to maintain due to exchange rate volatility.⁵⁸

Newborn deaths. A report prepared by the Punjab government's Planning and Development Board on the Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn, Child Health and Nutrition Programme revealed that 1,000 pregnant women and more than 88,000 newborns and children under five had died at basic health units (BHUs) and rural health centres (RHCs) in Punjab during 2021, showing the poor state of rural health facilities and critical healthcare issues affecting poor women and children. The report was made public on 24 March and also stated that, out of a total of 88,021 deaths of children at BHUs and RHCs, 62,813 were stillbirths.⁵⁹

South Punjab Health Secretariat. On 14 January, the Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department issued a notification stating that matters related to health authorities in 11 districts of South Punjab were being transferred to the South Punjab Health Secretariat in Multan in phases.⁶⁰ Records relating to pharmacy, nursing, medical officers and women medical officers, specialist cadres, and dental and general cadres have been transferred from the Lahore Civil Secretariat to the South Punjab Health Secretariat in Multan.

Sehat Sahulat Programme. The status of the PTI-initiated health card scheme remained unclear in 2022. The year started with former Chief Minister Usman Buzdar declaring, 'Every family in Punjab will have access to medical treatment free of charge through the national health card by the end of March.'⁶¹ However, by the end of the year, Chief Minister Parvez Elahi had to write to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for payment of the health insurance card scheme's dues in the province.

Throughout the year, the media reported cases of hospitals refusing treatment under the programme. They complained of unreasonably low treatment rates offered by the government for surgeries because of which the hospitals were unable to bear the cost of medicines, surgical tools and operation theatre protocols and infection controls.

Housing and public amenities

Ravi development project. Farmers, landowners, environmentalists and legal experts feared the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA)'s forcible land acquisition for the development of a megacity along the river Ravi. They hold that the project is meant to feed the greed of real estate investors at the cost of the environment.

Following a petition filed by the Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan (PILAP), a group of concerned citizens, the LHC ruled on 25 January that the process of land acquisition by RUDA was ultra vires and violated environment laws. However, on 31 January, the Supreme Court suspended the LHC ruling and allowed RUDA to continue construction on the land that had already been acquired.⁶²

Allegedly, the Supreme Court ruling failed to restrain RUDA and it tried to acquire additional farmland in the area. PILAP filed another petition in the LHC to plead that RUDA was pursuing further land acquisition in contravention of the Supreme Court judgment of 31 January. The LHC restrained RUDA from carrying out land acquisition outside the orders of the Supreme Court on 13 October.⁶³

Illegal housing societies. Illegal housing societies remained a problem in Punjab. Fifteen housing schemes and town developers were declared illegal in the Gujarat district in June. The Rawalpindi Development Authority issued notices to 12 illegal housing schemes for illegal advertisements and marketing on 23 July.

The Lahore Development Authority demolished the infrastructure of private illegal housing schemes in an operation on Bedian Road on 2 June. Similar crackdowns on illegal developments were conducted in Toba Tek Singh and Gujranwala.

Environment

Devastating floods. A climate catastrophe hit Pakistan in the shape of flash floods, wreaking havoc across Pakistan in July and August. The southern districts of Punjab were among the areas worst affected. Between 15 July and 15 October, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority reported 49 deaths in Dera Ghazi Khan, 31 in Rajanpur, and 8 in Mianwali. A total of 3,177 people were injured in Rajanpur, 562 in Dera Ghazi Khan and 5 in Mianwali.

The unprecedented rains swept away livestock and damaged houses

and other infrastructure, including roads, train tracks, schools and healthcare centres. The stagnant water exposed local populations to dengue, malaria, diarrhoea, eye and skin infections and other ailments. Lack of food and drinking water caused additional health problems, especially for women and children.

As people in the flood-affected areas scrambled for survival, Chief Minister Parvez Elahi announced several financial aid packages for the flood victims of Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh and Mianwali. The package, announced on 1 August, promised PKR 600,000 to victims whose houses had been destroyed and PKR 400,000 to those whose houses had been partially damaged. However, the figures pledged by the chief minister kept changing in subsequent months and news reports do not provide a clear picture of the extent of relief and rehabilitation funds set aside for flood victims.

The people of Rajanpur in particular felt they had been left in the lurch. They claimed that the government had failed to repair broken banks and dykes to prevent water from reaching their residential areas. By September, most people in the district had begun returning home on foot, saying they could not continue living in tents and camps because the government was 'not facilitating them.'⁶⁴



The people of Rajanpur claimed that the government had failed to repair broken banks and dykes.

Smog. The government of Punjab claimed to work throughout the year to solve the acute problem of air pollution. It approved a master action plan to deal with the danger of smog on 27 August. Taking pre-emptive measures, the environment department in Bahawalpur booked 42 brick kiln owners and imposed a PKR 100,000 fine on them on 29 April for violating the standard operating procedures of 'zigzag' technology. Tyre burning factories were raided in Rahimyar Khan on 1 July and Shalamar Town in Lahore on 12 December for causing pollution. The government also took measures to check smoke-emitting vehicles and industrial

units; it imposed Section 144 across the province to ban the burning of crop residue and garbage on 22 September. The district administration in Gujrat announced a ban on stubble burning and formed an anti-smog squad.

However, these efforts remained insufficient to protect Lahore and its surrounding areas from the toxic air. The area's air quality index for pollution remained higher compared to other cities across the country towards the end of 2022. People, especially the elderly and those with heart and respiratory conditions, remained at risk, and minor ailments such as throat, skin and eye infections were common.

On 2 November, the US Air Quality Index indicated that Lahore was the world's most polluted city, with an air quality score of 438.⁶⁵ On 7 December, Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi announced an environmental emergency in Lahore and other cities to deal with the smog. On 8 December, on the orders of the LHC, public and private schools were instructed to remain open only four days a week.⁶⁶ Later, on 28 December, the court directed the education department to extend the winter holidays in schools across the city for another week – till 9 January – due to poor air quality. Even shops and restaurants were ordered to close by 10 pm on weekdays.

Regional cooperation to control air pollution. Much stress was laid on regional cooperation to control the toxic air that blows across Pakistan's neighbourhood. A World Bank report released in December identified six major air sheds (geographical areas cutting across national and international boundaries within which polluted air remains trapped) in South Asia where 'spatial interdependence in air quality' was high.⁶⁷ Pakistani Punjab was one of the regions included in this category. The report revealed that current levels of air pollution were estimated to cause over 2 million premature deaths each year in South Asia and that deaths would be highest in India's Indo-Gangetic Plain, Bangladesh and Pakistani Punjab.

Cultural rights

Saim Sadiq's debut film *Joyland*, which looks at themes of sexuality and gender conformity, stirred controversy in Punjab for much of the year. Although the film was cleared by the federal government, the Punjab Information and Culture Department decided to ban the film, 'in the wake of persistent complaints received from different quarters' under Section 9 of the Motion Pictures Ordinance 1979.⁶⁸ The film's producers approached the LHC, challenging the ban in Punjab on 17 November. *Joyland* became the country's first-ever movie to be shortlisted for the Academy Awards. Condemning the ban, Human Rights Watch stated that 'censorship and a clampdown on artistic expression undermines the basic principles of a democratic society... Pakistan is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression.'⁶⁹

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