



BALUCHISTAN



HIGHLIGHTS

- Enforced disappearances remained an egregious human rights violation, with short-term disappearances being used increasingly to silence dissent, compounded by impunity for perpetrators.
- Baloch militants continued to launch attacks on security forces, but also killed civilians either on suspicion of being ‘state informants’ or to instil a general climate of fear.
- Insurgent and religiously motivated outfits carried out at least 110 attacks in the province, killing 229 and wounding 282.
- In November, six Punjabi labourers were shot dead by unidentified men in Turbat.
- Women remained especially vulnerable to violence, with an alarmingly high rate of domestic violence at 48 percent.
- Baloch women activists played a key role in mobilizing local communities in protest against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Turbat as well as the arrest of Haq Do Tehreek chief Maulana Hidayatur Rehman in Gwadar.
- Several political leaders—among them JUI-F leader Hafiz Hamadullah and Jamaat-e-Islami chief Sirajul Haq—survived near-fatal attacks in different parts of Balochistan, including Zhob and Mastung.
- A prolonged armed battle in the Wadh area of Khuzdar saw rival groups under Shafiq-ur-Rahman Mengal and Sardar Akhtar Mengal taking positions against one another. At least ten persons lost their lives amid heavy exchanges of fire and mortar shelling. Shafiq Mengal, an allegedly establishment-backed tribal leader and politician, has been accused of running ‘death squads’ in the province.
- In September, six football players travelling from Dera Bugti to Sibi were abducted by unknown armed assailants. All of them were later released.
- A jailbreak in July in Chaman revealed that prison security remained precarious: 13 under-trial prisoners escaped.
- The provincial caretaker government included Jamal Raisani as a minister, who did not have a Pakistani national identity card at the time of taking his oath of office.
- The local government system remained dysfunctional through the year, constrained by insufficient budgets.

- In a positive development, a women’s police station was established in Turbat.
- The shortage of teachers in government-run schools remained a grave concern, rendering at least 3,500 schools unable to provide students with educational services.
- An estimated 81,000 children were reportedly subjected to child labour in brick kilns in Balochistan.



OVERVIEW

As in previous years, the practice of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings remained a particularly serious concern in the province of Balochistan, with impunity for the perpetrators and indifference on the part of the government.

Towards the end of 2023, however, young Baloch rights activists—led by Baloch women associated with the Baloch Yakjehti Council and Voice for Baloch Missing Persons—mobilized around the extrajudicial killing of a Baloch youth allegedly at the hands of the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in November. A long march was organized from Turbat to Islamabad, where several hundred activists set up camp in December. They were subjected to harassment and their right to freedom of peaceful assembly continually violated in the form of violent police action.

Baloch residents continued to exercise their right to protest despite state crackdowns. A fierce tribal clash between rival factions of the Mengal tribe in Wadh unleashed a wave of protests by the Balochistan National Party (BNP-M).



A clash between two Mengal tribes in Wadh unleashed a wave of protests by the BNP-M.

In Gwadar, the Haq Do Tehreek continued to demand action against state-led rights violations, including enforced disappearances, hyper-securitization and failure to ensure people's access to livelihoods, schools, healthcare and electricity.

The political situation in the country was echoed in Balochistan. PTI workers blocked various roads across the province as the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan sparked a country-wide protest in May.

At least 44 PTI workers were arrested in the first wave while police raided the homes of the former governor Zahoor Agha and deputy speaker Qasim Khan Suri.¹ As a result of firing by the police on protesting PTI workers in Quetta, at least one party worker was killed.²

The rule of law in the province remained poor. In a case that sparked a national outcry, provincial lawmaker Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran was accused of detaining people in private jails as well as sexually assaulting and killing family members of an employee who had not complied with his wishes.³

Additionally, separatist outfits continued to create fear, with major attacks reported on security check-posts in Harnai, Chaman, Bolan, Quetta, and parts of Makran division.

A suicide attack on a police convoy in Bolan claimed the lives of nine police personnel, while over 50 people, including civilians were killed in a suicide attack near a mosque in Mastung. The climate of fear was compounded by attacks attributed to religious far-right outfits in Zhob and Mastung.

The grip of the military establishment was seen mirrored in the appointment of Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar as caretaker prime minister in August.

Many political analysts and politicians connected the appointment to Kakar's previous position within the establishment-backed Balochistan Awami Party (BAP).⁴



RULE OF LAW

Laws and law-making

Laws passed. The Balochistan Assembly passed seven acts in 2023, including the Balochistan Daanish Schools and Centres of Excellence Authority Act, which allowed the establishment of Daanish schools across the province,⁵ and the Balochistan Local Government (Amendment) Act.

Resolution passed. The year was also marked by the adoption of several resolutions by the provincial assembly, including one calling for an end to discrimination against ‘non-locals’ (people not of Baloch origin who had nonetheless been resident in the province for decades).⁶

Many lawmakers remained concerned about the financial crisis prevailing in the province. Despite an appeal for financial aid to alleviate the situation of people affected by the 2022 floods, the federal government remained indifferent to repeated requests from the provincial assembly to increase Balochistan’s share of the National Finance Commission award to PKR 50 billion.⁷

In two subsequent resolutions, the provincial government was asked to exempt mosques, government schools and seminaries from electricity and gas bills⁸ and urged to enhance women’s quota in government departments from 5 to 30 percent.⁹

The provincial government also passed a resolution supporting the decision to hold general elections.¹⁰ In July, a house committee was formed to assess the demands of protesting teachers at Bolan Medical College, who had demanded that their contracts be regularized.¹¹

Administration of justice

Cases pending. According to the Law and Justice Commission Pakistan, at the start of the year, the Balochistan High Court had a backlog of 4,471 cases, and during 2023, a total of 6,659 new cases were filed with the court and 6,177 cases disposed of. As of December 2023, a total of 5,012 cases were pending for adjudication at the high court. The district judiciary had a backlog of 16,020 cases at the start of the year. A total of 64,804 new cases were filed with the province’s district courts during 2023, with courts disposing of 63,957 cases in the same period. At the end of the year, 17,818 cases were pending at the district tier.

Pleas and petitions. The year began with the Supreme Court of Pakistan admitting a plea for regular hearing from the Balochistan government against the appointment of the special assistant to the chief minister.¹²

In 2018, the Balochistan government had passed the Special Assistants to the Chief Minister Balochistan Act to create legal grounds for such appointments. In 2020, the Balochistan High Court had declared this act null and void. The provincial government had then appealed to the Supreme Court against the verdict.

In March, the Balochistan High Court debarred the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) from continuing with by-polls in the NA-265 constituency after PTI president Qasim Khan Suri filed a petition seeking to suspend an ECP order de-notifying him from his seat.¹³

A division bench of the Balochistan High Court stopped the allotment of 15,000 acres of land in the command area of Winder in Hub district. A petition was filed by National Assembly member Mohammad Aslam Bhootani against the allotment of the land, which was deemed a violation of land rights.¹⁴

In May, the Balochistan High Court started hearing a petition against former Prime Minister Imran Khan, seeking his trial for high treason under Article 6 of the Constitution.¹⁵ The case was later adjourned by the court. In June, Khan was indicted in yet another case related to the murder of a senior lawyer.¹⁶ The court upheld Khan's arrest warrant.¹⁷ Subsequently, the court issued sedition notices against Khan for not complying with a Supreme Court order dated 7 April 2022, concerning the dissolution of the National Assembly.¹⁸



ENFORCEMENT OF LAW

Law and order

Crime statistics. Gender-based violence and other crimes continued to be committed in the province during 2023 (see Table 1). According to the provincial police, there were 137 law enforcement personnel killed in attacks by militants in 2023.

HRCP’s media monitoring for 2023 also recorded at least two cases of domestic violence, 14 cases of sexual violence, 22 ‘honour’ killings and 43 murders (associated with femicide) that reportedly took place in the province.

Table 1: Crime statistics for Balochistan in 2023

| Offense | Number |
|-------------------|------------|
| Rape | 24 victims |
| ‘Honour’ killings | 28 victims |
| Blasphemy cases | 4 cases |
| Police encounters | 9 cases |

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

In terms of gender parity, the police shared that their law enforcement personnel included 37,920 men, 889 women and one transgender person.

Private jails run by lawmaker. In a horrifying incident, on 21 February, police raided the house of the provincial minister for communication and works, Sardar Abdur Rehman Khetran, after several bodies—one woman and three children—were found in a well near the minister’s house. The raid came after Marri tribesmen entered the Red Zone in Quetta to protest the killings. The victims were said to be family members of Muhammad Khan Marri, formerly Khetran’s private guard. Marri accused Khetran of killing his family members and keeping five of his siblings in private jails.¹⁹ In June, five people working on the installation of a water pipeline in the Gaza area of Kalat were kidnapped by unknown armed men.²⁰

High levels of militancy. The province stood the second-most affected in terms of law and order after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Insurgents and religiously motivated outfits carried out at least 110 attacks in the province, killing 229 and wounding 282.²¹

Suicide bombings continued to hit the province, with direct attacks by insurgent groups on security forces. In two separate incidents, the office of the National Database and Registration Authority in Kech was

attacked twice, first in January and then in March.²² A subsequent attack (using a remote-controlled improvised explosive device) targeted the son of a PTI provincial assembly member, Sardar Khan Rind. Although he survived, his private guards were killed.²³ On 12 September, two consecutive blasts in Quetta left four people dead and 21 injured. The first attack was carried out by the banned separatist outfit, the Balochistan Liberation Army, which had targeted police officer Naseer Ahmed Shah.

In a high-profile attack, the Jamaat-e-Islami emir Sirajul Haq survived a suicide bombing in Zhob district in May.²⁴ In July, militants carried out attacks in Zhob and Sui, which left 12 soldiers dead.²⁵ In the same month, a terrorist attack in Zhob Cantt was repulsed by security forces.²⁶ However, earlier in March, nine constabulary personnel in Bolan lost their lives when their convoy was hit by a suicide bomber riding an explosive-laden motorbike.²⁷ In another attack in Kuchlak, four CTD personnel were killed when armed militants said to be involved in the Bolan bombing—cordoned off by security forces—resorted to indiscriminate firing.²⁸ A landmine blast in August killed seven people in Panjgur, including a union council chairman. The mine was reportedly planted by militants.²⁹

On 28 September, a deadly suspected suicide attack in Mastung killed 53 people and left hundreds injured. The bombing was claimed by the proscribed outfit, the Islamic State. The attack targeted a large gathering of Sunni sect adherents who were to leave for an Eid Milad-un-Nabi rally in Mastung.³⁰

Three more incidents took place in September. Six football players were abducted by armed assailants while travelling from Dera Bugti to Sibi.³¹ By October, all six had been released. JUI-F leader Hafiz Hamadullah came under attack in Mastung.³² The province also witnessed an intense battle between the Abro and Lehri tribes in the Kachhi area of Dera Murad Jamali.³³

In November, six Punjabi labourers in Turbat were shot dead by unidentified men.³⁴ In a second incident, 24 soldiers lost their lives when two security force vehicles came under heavy attack in Gwadar.³⁵ Subsequently, in another attack on a security check-post, militants took three policemen hostage.³⁶

Tribal clashes. Apart from militant attacks, the province saw a surge in violent tribal clashes. In the Wadh area of Khuzdar, two rival factions of the Mengal tribe engaged in heavy firing and mortar shelling, which continued for several months from August to October.

At least ten people, including ordinary commuters along the Quetta-Karachi Highway, lost their lives in the prolonged armed battle, while much of the town was forced to close for long stretches.³⁷ By the end of the year, the violence had largely subsided.

Jails and prisons

A total of 12 jails were operational in Balochistan during 2023 according to the Balochistan Prisons Department. These prisons housed 1,631 under-trial prisoners, 964 convicted prisoners and seven juvenile inmates against a sanctioned capacity of 2,764. Of the persons on death row, 74 were jailed for murder. Overall, the total inmates included 2,716 men, 41 women and 11 children living with their mothers in jail.

In terms of maintaining a safe and healthy environment across jails in Balochistan, some initiatives included reforms to convert prisons into vocational training centres³⁸ and the decision to have at least one male and one female doctor in each jail. Balochistan has 11 jails in all, of which only one has a doctor.³⁹ A jailbreak in July in Chaman, in which 13 under-trial prisoners managed to escape, indicated the precarious security in the province's jails.⁴⁰

Enforced disappearances

Continued enforced disappearances remained cause for grave concern in Balochistan in 2023, including short-term disappearances, which were calculated to instil fear among dissidents, political workers and rights activists. While dozens of new cases were reported throughout Balochistan, there were some instances in which victims returned home. There were also reports of alleged extrajudicial killings of forcibly disappeared people, especially after any major attacks carried out by Baloch militants. As in previous years, Baloch activists continued to demand an end to enforced disappearances and accountability for those involved in this practice, adding that people deemed guilty of any crime should be produced before a court and their right to due process upheld.

Number of cases. According to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, there have been 2,752 cases reported in the province since 2011 till date, of which 1,990 were resolved with the victims returning home, two traced to internment centres, 20 traced to prisons, and 37 disposed of after the victims' dead bodies were found. As of the end of 2023, the commission has 468 pending enforced disappearance cases left to resolve. HRCP has continued to maintain that the number of cases is likely vastly underreported. According to the organization Defence of Human Rights, as of end-December, out of 82 people reported as having been forcibly disappeared from Balochistan, the whereabouts of 67 remained unknown, 12 had been released, two traced and one extrajudicially killed.⁴¹

Provincial commission. In January, following a Balochistan High Court order, the provincial government formed the first-ever commission to tackle enforced disappearances. At its first meeting, the commission decided to extend its support to the families of missing persons in the province.⁴²

However, no mention was made of financial compensation for victims or their families. Disappointingly, the commission remained in hibernation through the rest of the year.

Cases of enforced disappearance. Despite the constitution of such a commission, illegal abductions of Baloch citizens continued. In January, the bodies of two missing Baloch youth were found. Both Sarang Marri and Waheed Zehri had been missing for over a month.⁴³ On 3 February, Rashida Bibi, along with her husband, mother and two siblings, were abducted from their home in Quetta. Rashida, her mother and her children were subsequently released but her husband remained missing.⁴⁴

In July, Salim Baloch, a Punjab University history graduate, and his friend, Ikram Naem, were abducted from their homes in Turbat, allegedly by security agency personnel. Similarly, Shams Baloch, a student at Sargodha University, was forcibly disappeared from Khuzdar in August. Two days later, his uncle Fazal Yaqoob Baloch was reportedly disappeared after unidentified persons broke into his home and threatened his family. Both were released several days later.

Raising concerns over the lack of resolution of cases of enforced disappearance, the BNP-M warned in February that the party would part ways with the federal government if the issue was not resolved.⁴⁵ In April, the Young Doctors Association held a protest in Quetta, demanding the release of two doctors, Nabi Dad Bugti and Fayyaz Laskhari, who had been kidnapped from Ziarat by armed men.⁴⁶ In July, HRCP member Salim Baloch was abducted from Turbat.⁴⁷ In the same month, a Baloch youth, Shahan, went missing from Kalat.



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FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Freedom of assembly

The province remained in the grip of prolonged protests and sit-ins. Hundreds of women rallied against the arrest of Haq Do Tehreek chief Maulana Hidayatur Rehman in Gwadar, after he was taken into custody in January on charges of attempted murder, which his supporters alleged were fabricated.⁴⁸

In another incident, the highway connecting Karachi to Quetta was blocked by protesters in Dalbandin, Chagai, after the murder of a Baloch youth, Sanaullah Notezai, allegedly by sectarian outfit Jaish-ul-Adl.⁴⁹

In the same month, protesters in Wadh, Khuzdar district, blocked the highway connecting Khuzdar to Karachi for 20 hours after the killing of two persons associated with the BNP-M, Kahor Khan and Ali Ahmed.⁵⁰

As tension in Wadh escalated, BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal vowed to lead a long march to Quetta in protest. The provincial government imposed Section 144, preventing assemblies, and citing growing security concerns in the province.⁵¹

Highly charged PTI workers led protests in Quetta after the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan sparked countrywide protests in May.⁵² At least one PTI worker was killed and six injured as protestors burnt two police vehicles and were tear-gassed in return. In July, owing to the unrest in Wadh, Khuzdar, BNP-M supporters protested along the N-70 highway, calling for an end to lawlessness and extortion.⁵³ Protestors also demonstrated in July against the alleged enforced disappearance of a Baloch youth from Kalat, who had gone missing in 2022.⁵⁴

Soaring electricity bills also ignited protests, with traders in Quetta demanding a reduction in bills.⁵⁵ In November, several landowners blocked roads at multiple locations in Quetta to protest prolonged power outages.⁵⁶

Protest against extrajudicial killing. Notably in late November, Turbat saw large-scale protests against the alleged extrajudicial killing of 24-year-old Balaach Mola Baksh, who was in the CTD's custody when he was killed. The protests gathered rapid momentum and morphed into a long march led by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee to Islamabad.⁵⁷ Hundreds of young women and men mobilized around demands for an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, with rights activist Mahrang Baloch playing a key role.

Despite constant high-handed attempts by the state apparatus to prevent them from reaching the capital – including arrests and baton charges en

route that left many injured – the protestors reached Islamabad on 20 December. There, the police used excessive force against protestors trying to enter the city as well as those camped outside the National Press Club: teargas, water cannons and batons were used and attempts made to forcibly load the protestors onto Quetta-bound buses.⁵⁸ Over 300 people, including women, children, students, and the elderly, were arbitrarily detained.

Freedom of expression

The state of freedom of expression in the province remained, as in previous years, markedly poor. An investigative news report revealed that most media persons were unwilling to go on the record even to discuss curbs on press freedom, saying that there were myriad actors, including security forces, separatist groups and tribal chiefs who, if angered by a news report, were likely to resort to violence to prevent such reportage.

Reporting on facts, especially with respect to security operations, was deemed virtually impossible, while issues such as enforced disappearances were rarely covered, with the broadcast media unable to do so at all. The situation was compounded by poor working conditions in the shape of low wages and little security when reporting from conflict zones. The Balochistan Union of Journalists reportedly had only 145 members, including four women.⁵⁹

In December, Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement chief Manzoor Pashteen was arrested by police in Chaman on his way to Quetta, reportedly to express solidarity with the Baloch Yakjehti Committee march against enforced disappearances. He had just addressed a sit-in organized by the All Parties Tajir Mehnat Kash. Reports suggest that both the police and Pashteen's security detail exchanged fire.⁶⁰

Unlike Sindh, Balochistan was unable to enact a provincial law to secure the safety of media personnel due to procedural delays. On 12 September, the Balochistan Union of Journalists expressed its concern over the safety of journalists breaking news from Balochistan.⁶¹

Situation of religious minorities

The situation of religious minorities remained largely the same. The government was relatively active, however, in bringing some relief to minority communities in the province.

In August, the provincial government announced an increase in the job quota for religious minorities from 2 to 5 percent.⁶² Earlier, in April, it had allocated PKR 300 million for the renovation of the centuries-old Haglaj Mata temple in Lasbela.⁶³

In Quetta's Shanti Nagar area, the lower-caste Hindu Lachi community remained confined to makeshift homes, with poor access to livelihood opportunities, water and sanitation, and electricity. The community has waited years to complete the construction of a local temple, but their efforts have been hampered by insufficient funds, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of prioritization by the authorities.⁶⁴



DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Political participation

By-election. Political events gained momentum in early February, with a by-election held in constituency NA-265 after it fell vacant when PTI MNA Qasim Khan Suri was de-notified by the ECP. Some 32 candidates submitted their nomination papers, including Mahmood Khan Achakzai, head of the PKMAP, Qasim Khan Suri, Rahila Hameed Durrani of the PML-N, Ali Muhammad Jatak of the PPP and Muhammad Jamal of the BNP.⁶⁵

PPP ranks swell. A broader political change in Balochistan was observed in January as many political stalwarts began to join the ranks of the PPP after being invited to do so by co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari. In the same month, former provincial ministers Nawabzada Gazin Marri and Tahir Mahmood, coordinator to the Balochistan chief minister Nawabzada Jamal Raisani and Mir Fareed Raisani joined the PPP. Former chief minister Mir Qudoos Bizenjo had already announced he would join the party.⁶⁶

PTI-led violent protests and disproportionate state response. Following former Prime Minister Imran Khan's arrest in May and ensuing riots countrywide, former deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Qasim Khan Suri, provincial minister Mobeen Khilji and other PTI leaders were booked for inciting violence in the province, after a series of protests in Quetta in which at least one person was killed.

According to the police, 70 PTI workers and leaders were arrested for their alleged involvement in violent protests in Quetta and other parts of the province.⁶⁷ Similar to several other PTI leaders, Sardar Yar Muhammad Rind, a member of the Balochistan Assembly, strongly condemned the 9 May riots and called for action against those responsible.⁶⁸

Caretaker government. In August, while the country's political landscape remained tense, caretaker governments were installed at the centre as well as in Balochistan and Sindh. The nomination of a member of the BAP, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, as caretaker prime minister raised concerns, given the BAP's reported backing by the military establishment.⁶⁹ After a long delay, Ali Mardan Domki was made caretaker chief minister of Balochistan in August.⁷⁰

Towards the end of the year, once the general elections had been announced, politicians began to put their weight behind the mainstream political parties.⁷¹ Some 30 politicians joined the PML-N⁷² including the former head of the BAP, Jam Kamal Khan Alyani. In contrast, Sarfraz Bugti, who was the caretaker interior minister, withdrew from his post and joined the PPP.⁷³

Local government

In February, with the completion of the third phase of local elections in Chagai, local government elections were completed in the province. Mayors of municipal corporations, chairmen and deputy chairmen of municipal committees and union councils were elected in 32 out of the province's 34 districts.⁷⁴

Elections could not be held in Quetta district due to the disputed delimitation of local government constituencies.⁷⁵ The local governments remained constrained, however, by insufficient budgets and were effectively dysfunctional on the ground.



RIGHTS OF THE DISADVANTAGED

Women

Gender-based violence. Violence against women continued to be reported through the year. In February, a man in Dera Murad Jamali killed his teenage daughter for refusing a marriage match.⁷⁶ In another incident in March, a 35-year-old woman was killed in Barkhan allegedly in the name of ‘honour’.⁷⁷ ‘Honour’ crimes and femicide did not ease as the year progressed.

In April, a man hanged his wife in the Sui area, claiming she had had illegal relations with another man.⁷⁸ In May, a man killed his wife and a male friend, accusing them of adultery.⁷⁹ In a separate incident in June, two women lost their lives when armed men barged into a house in Dera Murad Jamali, leaving two others injured.⁸⁰

Earlier in June, in a shocking incident, a teenage girl was sentenced to death by a local jirga in Chagai after being accused of ‘illegal’ relations with a man, who was spared.⁸¹

In August, 20-year-old Rukhsana was murdered by her father in the name of ‘honour’ in Mastung,⁸² while two minor girls were shot dead by unknown assailants in the Kachhi area of Dera Murad Jamali. The province was also ranked second after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of the incidence of domestic violence, estimated at 48 percent.⁸³

The Balochistan government made some efforts to mitigate violence against women in the province. One year after the establishment of the first women’s police station in Quetta in March 2022, a second women’s police station was established in Turbat in February.⁸⁴

Women’s political participation. In March, the provincial assembly adopted a resolution calling for an increase in the quota for women in government departments, enhancing it from 5 to 33 percent and establishing a separate women’s directorate at the divisional level to resolve problems encountered by women while performing their duties.⁸⁵

The spirit of the resolution was not reflected in much action on the ground, however. Women’s political participation in Balochistan remained low. In 2018, Balochistan had 1,813,241 female voters, and by 2023, the number increased to 2,316,804. Despite the increase, Balochistan still had the lowest number of female voters among all the provinces.⁸⁶

Transgender persons

In a bid to give relief to marginalised communities—including transgender persons—affected by the 2022 floods, the Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability, in collaboration with the

United Nations Development Programme, initiated a project under which 36,000 national identity cards and 49,000 replacement cards were to be released for the target groups in question.⁸⁷

Children

Violence against children. According to NGO Sahil's *Cruel Numbers* report, there were 4,213 cases of child sexual abuse reported in Pakistan during the year, 2 percent of which (at least 84 cases) took place in Balochistan.

HRCP's media monitoring also recorded two instances of corporal punishment against students reported in Balochistan—Gwadar and Quetta specifically. In one horrific incident in September, a 35-year-old woman in Quetta poisoned her four daughters before committing suicide.⁸⁸ In a separate incident, an eight-year-old child, the son of a daily-wage labourer, went missing in Khuzdar and was later found dead in the Nall area.⁸⁹

Child marriage. To counter early child marriage through legal reforms, the provincial government reportedly notified the Federal Shariat Court on 22 March that a bill prohibiting child marriage had been completed and would shortly be submitted to the provincial assembly for approval.

The draft law, known as the Balochistan Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2021, was brought to the fore during a 2022 suo motu hearing regarding the forced marriage of a five-year-old girl in Khuzdar. Following allegations that a resident of Khuzdar had married off his minor daughter under duress from tribal chiefs, the court had initiated the suo motu hearing. The provincial law officer of Balochistan was questioned about the steps being taken by the provincial legislature to prevent child marriage as well as forced marriage.⁹⁰

Child labour. According to reports, out of an estimated 700,000 children subjected to child labour in brick kilns across the country, 81,000 worked in brick kilns in Balochistan while 3,251 children were working in the agricultural sector.⁹¹

Labour

Mining accidents. Balochistan continued to witness a high number of mining accidents across the approximately 15,000 coal mines in the province. At least 36 mine workers were killed and 40 injured in Balochistan during 2023 according to HRCP's media monitoring (see Table 2).

In the first three months of 2023 alone, 30 miners lost their lives as a result of cave-ins, explosions or inhalation of poisonous gases.⁹² In Harnai in March, six coal miners were killed after exposure to poisonous

gas. In an unfortunate incident, the bodies of two coal miners trapped in a mine in Dukki were recovered after a 40-day-long rescue operation, reflecting the lack of adequate rescue equipment and expertise in this sector.⁹³

Table 2: Mining accidents in Balochistan in 2023

| <i>Date</i> | <i>City</i> | <i>Killed</i> | <i>Injured</i> |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| 24 Jan | Harnai | - | 1 |
| 25 Jan | Dukki | - | 1 |
| 31 Jan | Dukki | 1 | - |
| 10 Feb | Harnai | 1 | 5 |
| 11 Feb | Dukki | 3 | - |
| 27 Feb | Harnai | - | 1 |
| 28 Feb | Harnai | 4 | 3 |
| 4 Mar | Harnai | 6 | 9 |
| 21 Mar | Dukki | 2 | - |
| 4 Apr | Dukki | 1 | 2 |
| 8 Apr | Harnai | 1 | - |
| 26 Apr | Dukki | 1 | 3 |
| 12 May | Harnai | 1 | - |
| 14 May | Dukki | 1 | - |
| 28 May | Dukki | 1 | 3 |
| 28 May | Dukki | 1 | 5 |
| 7 Jun | Harnai | - | 1 |
| 25 Jun | Dukki | 2 | 2 |
| 13 Jul | Mach | 1 | 1 |
| 8 Aug | Dukki | 2 | - |
| 14 Aug | Harnai | 2 | - |
| 23 Aug | Harnai | - | 1 |
| 29 Aug | Hub | - | 1 |
| 15 Sep | Quetta | 1 | - |
| 18 Sep | Quetta | 1 | - |
| 20 Sep | Harnai | 1 | - |
| 1 Dec | Quetta | 2 | 1 |

Source: HRCP media monitoring.

Amid the province's deteriorating security, four coal miners were shot dead by unidentified armed assailants in Harnai in February.⁹⁴ The growing security problem in the province and around coal mines also caused many mines to close, leaving hundreds of workers unemployed. Security concerns were particularly high in the Margat coalfield in Bolan.⁹⁵



Out of an estimated 700,000 children subjected to child labour in brick kilns across the country, 81,000 worked in brick kilns in Balochistan.

Labour status of fisherfolk. In a positive development in January, the Balochistan government decided to give the province's fisherfolk community the status of labour, a key demand of the Gwadar-based Haq Do Tehreek. The decision was intended to secure the economic rights of fisherfolk in Balochistan by bringing them within the ambit of the province's labour laws and ILO conventions. The government also established a technical working group chaired by the secretary of the Fisheries and Coastal Development Department, which was tasked with introducing a new fisheries policy while revising the legal framework governing this sector.⁹⁶

Refugees

The number of registered Afghan refugees in Balochistan is over 300,000, according to UNHCR estimates.⁹⁷ Most refugees in the province are settled in residential areas outside the refugee camps. Many are engaged in business based on their identity cards.

After the caretaker federal government announced in October that all 'illegal' refugees were to be deported from the country, the provincial government launched a crackdown on refugees in the province, the overwhelming majority of whom were Afghan or of Afghan origin.

Five centres were established for the registration of Afghan refugees across Balochistan, including in Quetta. In November, the caretaker information minister claimed that around 66,000 'illegal' immigrants had returned to Afghanistan through the Chaman border crossing, of which 26,000 'illegal' immigrants had travelled to Chaman from Sindh.⁹⁸

Numerous Afghans complained of harassment by the Pakistani authorities, with many claiming that despite possessing the legal documents needed to stay, police and authorities were harassing them to leave Pakistan.⁹⁹ Reports from the field suggest that those being deported were kept in poor conditions in camps in Chaman before being deported to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰



Education

Out-of-school children. Despite adopting legislation to institute Daanish schools for underprivileged children in the province, teacher absenteeism and the closure of over 3,000 government-run schools as a result of teacher shortages contributed to poor education indicators in 2023.¹⁰¹

The number of out-of-school children in Balochistan was estimated at 3.13 million,¹⁰² with a significant 78 percent of all girls out of school.¹⁰³ The ‘ghost teachers’ phenomenon continued to take a toll on education in the province: around 5,000 teachers were reportedly listed as ‘ghost teachers’. In August, students in Barkhan and Naseerabad resorted to protesting publicly against the absence of teachers.¹⁰⁴

Higher education. Higher education in the province fared no better. In January, students closed the University of Turbat in protest against fee hikes announced by the administration.¹⁰⁵

Faculty at the University of Balochistan took to the streets in September to protest against the financial crisis being faced by the institution, which was unable to pay its faculty and could not increase tuition fees because this would prevent students from underprivileged backgrounds from attending. Teaching ground to a halt as a result.¹⁰⁶ The protests ended after the government provided a grant to the university, but the larger problem of resource constraints to higher education remains.

In June, students at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women’s University staged a protest against the administration, highlighting the lack of basic facilities at the institution.¹⁰⁷

In November, the Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences was plunged into chaos when clashes erupted between law enforcement personnel and students over a decision to impose stricter regulations at the university’s hostels while increasing charges. The university remained closed as a result for several weeks.¹⁰⁸

Balochistan’s higher education campuses remained heavily securitized as in previous years. Students continue to be banned from holding ‘political’ events and security agencies maintain a constant presence on campuses.¹⁰⁹

Schools after floods. Many schools hit by the devastating floods of 2022 remained in precarious condition and the rehabilitation process was either slow or unsatisfactory. Prior to the floods, there were over 30,260 primary, middle and high schools spread across the 34 districts of Balochistan.

Of these, 2,869 public schools were affected by the floods in 2022,¹¹⁰ although a UNICEF estimate puts this figure at around 6,000 schools. As a result, more than 386,600 students and 17,660 teachers and staff were significantly affected by damaged school infrastructure.¹¹¹

Data obtained from the Balochistan education department reveals that out of 12,260 schools (8,315 boys' schools and 3,425 girls' schools) and 520 co-educational schools surveyed after the 2022 floods, 61 percent had been affected: 8 percent had been destroyed, 6 percent left in poor and dangerous condition, 9 percent damaged but with some classrooms safe, and 37 percent partially damaged but considered safe.¹¹² The renovation and repair work on damaged schools was still in progress as of end-2023; most of these schools were located in Naseerabad division.



More than 386,600 students and 17,660 teachers and staff were significantly affected by damaged school infrastructure due to floods.

Health

The province's health infrastructure remained poor in 2023 as before. The 2022 floods and ensuing displacement and loss of homes and livelihoods were associated with poor mental health outcomes.¹¹³ A high incidence of malaria was also reported in Sohbatpur, which witnessed malaria outbreaks following the heavy floods that hit the district.¹¹⁴

Congo virus. In May, a woman in Quetta lost her life to the Congo virus. The spread of the virus set off alarm bells in government circles and the health ministry initiated an alert across the province.¹¹⁵

This state of affairs worsened to the extent that the authorities declared a two-week curfew on private slaughterhouses in Quetta, under Section 144. The authorities attempted to shift animal slaughter houses to facilities located away from densely populated regions in an effort to stop the virus from spreading further.

Two doctors tested positive for the Congo virus at the Civil Hospital in Quetta, bringing the total number of afflicted medical workers to eight by November.¹¹⁶ By year-end, however, the virus had been brought under control.

A health crisis persisted in Kech as 45 cases of dengue fever were reported by the authorities in June.¹¹⁷ The provincial health department declared an emergency in the Aranji area of Khuzdar district to contain a severe outbreak of diarrhoea in July.¹¹⁸

Health workers. Hospitals in the province were also affected by doctor absenteeism. In February, responding to the issue, the health ministry started disciplinary proceedings against 57 doctors.¹¹⁹

Moreover, the only cancer treatment facility in the province, Cenar in Quetta, suffered from a continuous shortage of essential cancer treatment medicines.¹²⁰

Health card. In January, the government announced it was launching a Balochistan 'health card'. This facility came at the cost of PKR 5.914 billion and was intended to provide health insurance facilities of up to PKR 1 million to 1.875 million families.¹²¹

Housing and public amenities

In a move to facilitate the fisherfolk community in Gwadar, the government approved a housing scheme in January under which the Gwadar Development Authority would allocate 200 acres for the establishment of homes for low-income fisherfolk families.¹²²

Environment

Flash floods. The province was hit by periodic climate change-induced flash floods between March and May, resulting in loss of life and property and the closure of roads.

In March, a family of eight was swept away and killed while trying to cross a seasonal stream in Awaran. On the same day, two others lost their lives after being washed away by a flash flood in Zhob.¹²³

In May, in 24 hours alone, eight people were killed in rain-related incidents across the province. Quetta, Lasbela, Khuzdar and Musa

Khel remained in the grip of heavy rainfall.¹²⁴ Two teenagers lost their lives in Panjgur after a wall collapsed in the rain and buried them both. Taking notice of the worsening situation, the prime minister announced an emergency in the province in May to prevent further loss of life.¹²⁵ However, as the monsoon hit the region in July, six people were killed in rain-related incidents.¹²⁶

On 27 July, heavy rains washed away several causeways in Pinjra Pull and Lasbela, bringing traffic between Balochistan and Sindh to a halt.¹²⁷ On the same day, the rains killed five more people.¹²⁸ In separate rain-related incidents in August, 11 people lost their lives and more than 400 houses were destroyed.¹²⁹

Earthquakes. The province remained prone to intermittent earthquakes. In one such incident in April, three members of a family lost their lives in Chaman when the roof of their house collapsed in the wake of a jolt.¹³⁰ In April, earthquake jolts were felt in Chaman and other parts of the province.¹³¹

According to surveys conducted by Foresight Research, a Karachi-based research organization, the province's residents are increasingly concerned about climate change in Balochistan. About 45 percent of respondents expressed concern over high rainfall, while 50 percent of respondents in Turbat cited 'less rainfall' as a major climate problem.¹³²

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