

PRISON DATA REPORT PAKISTAN'S PRISON LANDSCAPE: TRENDS, DATA, AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024



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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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JUSTICE PROJECT PAKISTAN

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the countless individuals in Pakistan's prisons whose stories often remain unheard, their families who bear the emotional and financial cost, and the advocates who work tirelessly to bring justice and dignity to those most vulnerable. Their resilience inspires our ongoing commitment to reform.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of the Prison Data Report 2024. This report was generously funded by the European Union (EU), whose support was instrumental in establishing the first public database on Pakistan's prisons. This database features a comprehensive analysis and evidence-based policies and strategies for reform, marking a significant step toward systemic change.

A special acknowledgment goes to:

- Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha, Chairperson of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), for her unwavering commitment to upholding the rights of prisoners and ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard. Her invaluable contribution and steadfast advocacy have been instrumental in shaping this report.
- Mr. Azhar Rashid Khan, Director General (Retd.), National Academy of Prison Administration (NAPA), for championing the adoption and compliance with UN Minimum Standards, such as the Mandela Rules, and fostering a deeper understanding of these standards within the prison department. His efforts have been crucial in aligning Pakistan's prison administration with international best practices.

We also recognize the tireless efforts of the Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) team, whose work in providing strategic solutions, gathering data to enhance policymaking, and relentlessly advocating for the most vulnerable Pakistani prisoners continues to drive meaningful change.

This report stands as a testament to the power of collaboration between national institutions and civil society. We remain steadfast in our conviction that our shared vision for a humane, equitable, and just prison system in Pakistan will inspire meaningful and lasting reforms that align with international human rights standards.

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Khizar Hayat, a mentally ill prisoner, spent 16 years on death row. In 2019, his family went to visit him in prison for the final meeting after his last death warrant was issued. He was unaware of his impending execution due to his mental state, and instead thought that his family was there to take him home. Chained to a hospital bed even in his last moments, he passed away a few days later, a victim of neglect who died awaiting justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (NCHR)

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) holds an “A” status accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), recognizing its full compliance with the UN Paris Principles and its independence as Pakistan’s premier human rights institution. With a comprehensive mandate to promote and protect human rights, NCHR has established itself as a leading voice in prison reform and prisoners’ rights. NCHR’s work encompasses providing pro bono legal aid to prisoners, conducting systematic prison monitoring, investigating human rights violations, and advising the government on legislative and policy reforms in line with Pakistan’s constitutional and international obligations. Through these efforts, NCHR has secured the release of over 100 juvenile prisoners, implemented substantial jail reforms following its investigative reports, and contributed significantly to international human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and various UN treaty bodies.

website: nchr.gov.pk

NATIONAL ACADEMY FOR PRISONS ADMINISTRATION (NAPA)

The National Academy of Prisons Administration (NAPA), operating under Pakistan’s Ministry of Interior, is the country’s premier institute dedicated to professional training and development for prison and correctional staff. As the sole institution of its kind, NAPA plays a critical role in enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of correctional services across Pakistan, including Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

NAPA’s mission encompasses a wide range of objectives aimed at improving prison administration and aligning practices with international standards. It delivers uniform training programs for prison officers and staff, while also offering specialized courses in human rights, prison management, and rehabilitation techniques for senior personnel. Additionally, NAPA equips staff with crisis management skills, promotes physical preparedness, and trains Probation and Parole Officers in effective methods for inmate rehabilitation and reintegration.

The academy also serves as a central hub for data collection, coordination, and the

implementation of international treaties and protocols on penal and correctional management. It emphasizes research and evidence-based policymaking, maintaining a comprehensive prison database and supporting the development of progressive prison policies. By collaborating with various departments linked to correctional services, providing technical training to enhance staff proficiency, offering legal and administrative advisory services, and assisting legislative bodies and academic institutions on psycho-social and legal issues, NAPA ensures the efficient and rights-based management of prisons.

Through its work, NAPA strives to modernize prison administration in line with the UN Minimum Standards, promoting a humane, rights-based approach that safeguards the dignity of incarcerated individuals and fosters systemic reforms across Pakistan.

JUSTICE PROJECT PAKISTAN (JPP)

Justice Project Pakistan (JPP), established 2009, is a legal action non-governmental organisation representing the most vulnerable Pakistani prisoners facing the harshest punishments, at home and abroad. JPP investigates, advocates, educates, and litigates, building public and political support as well as legal precedents that will lead to systemic reform of the criminal justice system in Pakistan. Its work combines strategic litigation, fierce domestic and international public and policy advocacy campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives to improve the representation and treatment of individuals facing extreme sentences in Pakistan and abroad.

Over the years, JPP has received national and international recognition for its work. In 2016, JPP was awarded the inaugural Franco-German Human Rights Prize and the National Human Rights Award, presented by the President of Pakistan. More recently, JPP received the ECPM Award for capital defense at the 8th World Congress Against the Death Penalty in November 2022.

JPP's Prison Reform project aims to enhance protections granted to prisoners under Pakistani law and align them with UN minimum standards, safeguard their rights, and ensure their dignity. We continue to work tirelessly with stakeholders at all levels to advocate for systemic change.

Through its extensive research, JPP has highlighted the lived experiences of prisoners and the historical evolution of Pakistan's penal system. In 2022, JPP released "*Serving Time: Pakistan's Prisons Through the Ages*," a comprehensive book and interactive web page offering insights into the experiences of

former under-trial and convicted prisoners across Pakistan. This publication also provides a historical overview of the evolution of Pakistan's penal system.

JPP has played an active role in key federal and provincial committees formed to address the urgent need for prison reform in Pakistan. These committees have focused on improving the treatment of prisoners, modernizing prison administration practices, and addressing systemic inefficiencies, particularly in Punjab, the country's most populous province, where overcrowding and management challenges are most severe. As part of its broader prison reform efforts, JPP has contributed evidence-based policy recommendations and strategic advice to the key criminal justice stakeholders, aiming to improve conditions for vulnerable prisoners, reduce overcrowding, and tackle the most pressing issues facing Pakistan's prisons.

JPP is collaborating with the NCHR, which is committed to monitoring and improving prison conditions through the exercise of its mandate to visit any place of detention, investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and furnish recommendations for reform and improvement.

Additionally, JPP is working closely with the National Academy for Prisons Administration and provincial prison authorities to align the administration of Pakistan's prisons with the UN Standard Minimum Rules. This collaboration involves numerous capacity-building initiatives for prison authorities and the drafting of revised prison rules, aimed at ensuring humane treatment and adherence to international standards.

This collaboration not only underscores the shared commitment of NCHR, NAPA and JPP to evidence-based policymaking but also serves as a foundation for addressing systemic challenges through comprehensive data analysis and targeted reforms. To address broader challenges in prison management, it is vital to analyse disaggregated data on Pakistan's prison population. This data not only highlights pervasive issues such as overcrowding, maladministration, and the failure to uphold the rights of those deprived of liberty but also offers critical insights for developing strategic, resource-efficient interventions to address these challenges.

This report aligns with the NCHR, NAPA and JPP's mission to bring the administration of Pakistan's prisons in line with international standards.¹ By presenting an evidence-driven approach, the report emphasizes the urgent need for Pakistan to fulfill its international human rights obligations under mechanisms such as the Human Rights Committee (HRC), the Committee Against Torture (CAT), and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), all of which stress the importance of improving detention conditions and safeguarding the rights of incarcerated individuals.

website: www.jpp.org.pk

¹ International standards include the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (*Nelson Mandela Rules*), the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (*Bangkok Rules*), the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (*Tokyo Rules*), and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (*Beijing Rules*).

2. METHODOLOGY

Now in its 3rd edition, Justice Project Pakistan's prison dataset serves as a critical tool for understanding Pakistan's prison landscape. This marks JPP's first joint report published in collaboration with both the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and the National Academy of Prison Administration (NAPA). By presenting disaggregated data, the dataset offers valuable insights into key trends and challenges, providing a foundation for evidence-based policymaking and reforms. Covering developments, trends, and figures from 2024, the report aims to support a better understanding of systemic issues and guide the formulation of strategic interventions.

The findings in this report are based on multiple reliable sources:

1. Official data obtained from Pakistan's provincial prison departments
2. Publications from other non-governmental organizations.
3. Interviews conducted with prisoners detained during the reporting period.
4. News articles and reports from credible media outlets.

Disaggregated data was shared with NCHR, NAPA and JPP by provincial prison departments during February, July and August, 2024. Using provincial Right to Information (RTI) laws, JPP requested detailed, updated data for 2024 from the Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Azad Jammu

& Kashmir (AJK) prison departments. The data provided included information disaggregated by trial status, offence, gender, and age. Specifically:

- Punjab data was received on July 24, 2024
- Sindh on July 19, 2024
- KP on August 1, 2024
- Balochistan on August 21, 2024
- Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK shared their respective data directly with NAPA
- Updated death row figures from all four provinces, AJK, and Gilgit-Baltistan were received in November, 2024
- The data on foreign nationals incarcerated in Pakistan was shared with the NCHR by provincial prison departments in February 2024

To calculate the population imprisoned for narcotics-related offences in KP and Balochistan, JPP utilised data from its April, 2024 report, *"Narcotics Offenses Dataset: Statistical Analysis & Qualitative Overview for Pakistan."* Additionally, raw data from previous years and information from earlier published reports were incorporated to facilitate time-series analyses.

It is important to note that inconsistencies in data recording standards across provinces and time periods limited the ability to conduct a holistic comparison and analysis. This highlights the urgent need for standardised, nationwide data collection practices to improve accuracy and comparability.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prison conditions in Pakistan fall significantly short of international standards, with inmates facing numerous systemic challenges, including severe overcrowding, unhygienic living conditions, insufficient access to clean water, nutritious food, and healthcare, exploitative labor practices, limited contact with family and legal counsel, and a lack of effective complaint mechanisms. Furthermore, prisons fail to provide adequate rehabilitative, educational, vocational, or recreational activities, undermining the core objectives of incarceration. With a population of **102,026 inmates housed in 128 facilities** across four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), Pakistan's prison system operates under immense strain.

Encouragingly, the national prison population grew by only 1.66% from 2023. However, overcrowding remains a critical concern, with over three-quarters of the prison population still under trial (**74,918 prisoners**).² Since 2010, Punjab has constructed 13 new prisons, including district jails in Okara, Pakpattan, Layyah, Bhakkar, and Rajanpur, as well as two high-security prisons in Sahiwal and Mianwali. Between 2010 and 2024, 140 new barracks and 928 additional death cells were also constructed, providing accommodation for over 4,000 inmates.³ These developments

aimed to expand the authorized capacity to 37,563 inmates by 2024.

However, persisting overcrowding, in spite of infrastructural additions, underscores systemic issues, such as ineffective bail and parole systems, prolonged judicial delays, and an overreliance on custodial measures. Over-incarceration for drug-related offences further exacerbates the issue. Rigid sentencing guidelines introduced by the 2022 Amendment to the Control of Narcotics Substance Act 1997 (CNSA) have intensified the problem by eliminating parole, probation, and remissions, leading to harsher and often disproportionate penalties.

For decades, multiple committees and working groups have been established to address the dire need for prison reforms in Pakistan, with a consistent focus on amending the outdated Pakistan Prison Rules. Recent initiatives include the Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee (2019), Chief Minister's Prison Reform Committees (2020 and 2022), the Ministry of Interior's Committee for Prison Reform (2024), and the Chief Justice's Prison Reform Committee (2024). In November 2024, the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan proposed a National Jail Reform Policy aligned with international standards

² From the four provinces, excluding AJK and GB

³ *Rida Qazi vs. The Government of Punjab*, <https://sys.lhc.gov.pk/appjudgments/2024LHC6036.pdf>

to ensure humane and rehabilitative management of Pakistan's prisons.⁴ These initiatives have consistently emphasised the urgent need to modernise Pakistan Prison Rules and align them with international standards.

Despite these recurring efforts, there has been no comprehensive review to revisit and evaluate the recommendations of previous committees or identify why they have not been implemented. This persistent failure to translate recommendations into action continues to hinder meaningful progress. While these reform initiatives offer hope for improvement, comprehensive judicial reform, alternative sentencing measures, and alignment of Pakistan Prison Rules with international standards remain crucial to addressing Pakistan's deep-rooted prison crisis.

The 2024 report highlights the chronic challenges Pakistan's prison system is facing, including severe overcrowding and staggering overrepresentation of under-trial prisoners. Rehabilitation and diversion programs remain critically underutilized, with community service absent as an alternative sentencing option. Vulnerable groups, such as women, juveniles, and individuals with psychosocial disabilities, continue to face inadequate protections. To achieve meaningful reform, the urgent implementation of revised Prison Rules and alignment with international standards, such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules), the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules), and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules), are essential to addressing these enduring challenges and ensuring a humane and just penal system.

4 Supreme Court of Pakistan, Press Release, 09 Dec 2024, <https://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/press-release-09-dec-2024-2/>



"It was a cruel world. I was kept in a jail for adult inmates. I had to beg to not be sodomised. Thankfully, they spared me. But a jail is no place for children, much less on death row. Unfortunately, my story isn't unique; there are lots of children living in the terror of an adult jail."

– Muhammad Iqbal, a former juvenile prisoner, who was set free after 22 years on death row

4. KEY TRENDS IN PAKISTAN'S PRISONS

In 2024, Pakistan's prison population saw a modest increase of **1.66%** from 2023, reflecting some stabilisation in overall numbers. However, overcrowding remains a critical concern, with most facilities operating well beyond their official capacity. On average, prisons are at **152.2% overcapacity**, underscoring the strain on an already fragile system. Under-trial prisoners account for 73.41% of the total prison population, highlighting systemic inefficiencies such as ineffective bail and parole systems, prolonged judicial delays, and an overreliance on pretrial detention. This represents a troubling increase from 2017, when under-trial prisoners made up 66% of the prison population – already far exceeding the global average of 27% at the time.⁵ The 8% rise over eight years illustrates the persistence of these structural issues.

The **2022 Amendment to the Control of Narcotics Substances Act (CNSA)**,⁶ which aimed to streamline sentencing for drug

offences, introduced harsher penalties for wider quantity thresholds, and eliminated the possibility of remissions, parole, and probation for drug offenders except for women and juveniles. Instead of alleviating overcrowding, it has contributed significantly to the problem. The rigid sentencing guidelines have eliminated alternatives to incarceration and directly lead to disproportionate penalties, exacerbating the issue of over-incarceration.

The number of prisoners on death row also rose slightly in 2024, increasing by **1.17%** to a total of **3,646 individuals**.⁷ Despite the Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2023, which abolished the death penalty for drug-related offences⁸, such offences remain a significant category for which death sentences are imposed.⁹ In Sindh alone, at least three death sentences for drug-related crimes were handed down in 2024, raising concerns about the inconsistent application of the amended law by the judiciary.¹⁰

5 Cursor of Development and Education, Pakistan (CODE), Addressing Overcrowding in Prisons by Reducing Pre-Conviction Detention in Pakistan, 2017, <https://codepak.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Addressing-overcrowding-in-prisons-by-reducing-pre-conviction->

6 The Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2022, https://senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1663142723_815.pdf

7 According to data shared with JPP by provincial IG Offices in November 2024.

8 Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2023 https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/64d4d874b52c0_506.pdf

9 In Pakistan, most death sentences are imposed for murder, terrorism, dacoity with murder, rape, and drug offences.

10 Dawn News, *Man gets death sentence in heroin smuggling case* (Jan 18, 2024) <https://www.dawn.com/news/1806773> ; Daily Pakistan, *Drug recovery case, convict sentenced to death, fined one lakh*, (Jan 16, 2024) <https://dailypakistan.com.pk/16-Jan-2024/1669615>

According to the latest figures, Pakistan’s prison system comprises **128 operational prisons** with an official capacity of approximately **65,811 inmates**. Despite some added infrastructural capacity, overcrowding, under-resourced facilities, and an excessive reliance on detention-centric penalties continue to characterize the country’s prison landscape. Comprehensive reforms, including the adoption of alternative sentencing measures aligned with international standards, are essential to addressing these systemic challenges. These reforms must include community-based alternative sentencing options, such as community service, to alleviate overcrowding and provide more rehabilitative approaches to justice.

Overcrowding remains the most pressing concern in Pakistan’s prisons, fueling a wide range of issues and human rights violations. Evidence-based strategies focused on reducing overcrowding, such as the operationalization of non-custodial measures and judicial reforms, represent the most effective way to achieve meaningful and sustainable reform.



Karachi’s Central Prison houses 8,518 inmates, despite having an official capacity of just 2,400, operating at an alarming 354.92% of its capacity – more than three times its intended limit.

4.1 OVERCROWDING AND OVER-INCARCERATION

■ HIGH OCCUPANCY LEVELS:

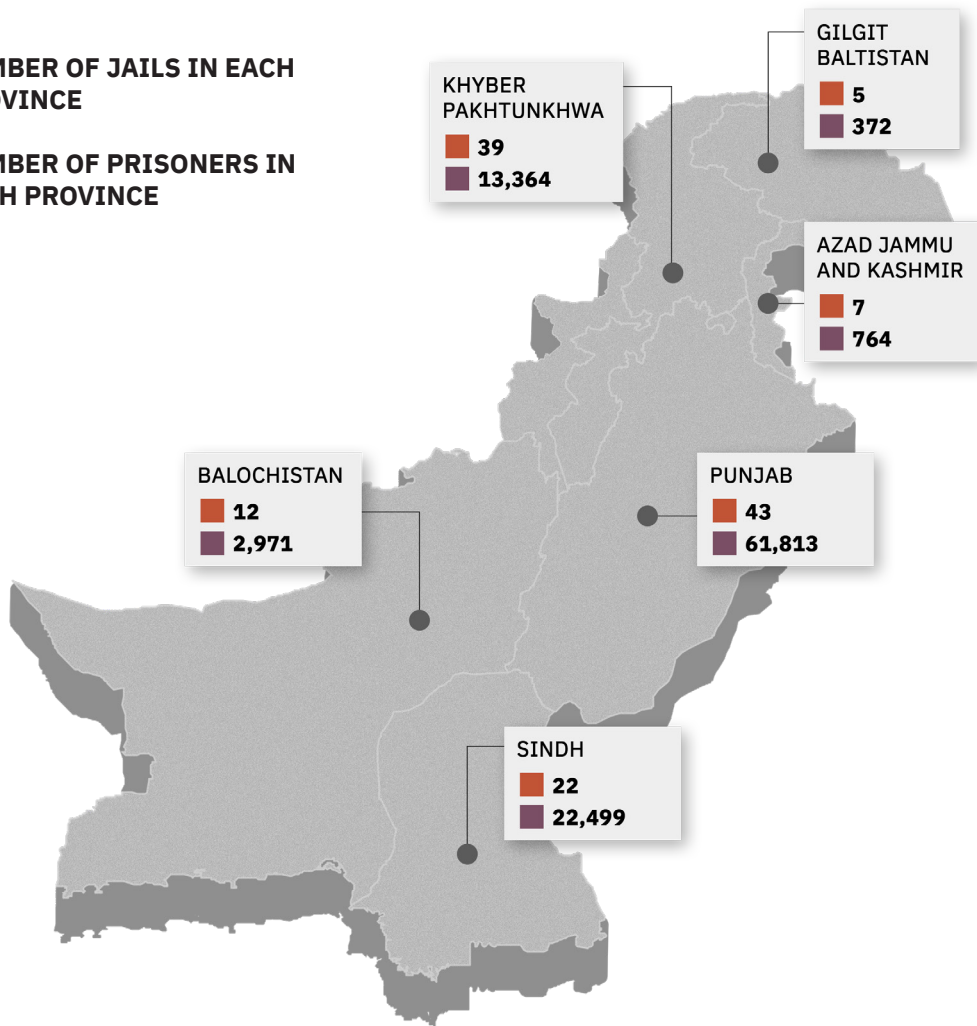
102,026 people are housed in 128 functioning jails across Pakistan including AJK and GB. With a nation-wide overcrowding rate of 152.2% – and some jails operating at 200-300% of their official capacity – these figures underscore the bleak conditions faced by incarcerated individuals in Pakistan.

■ PRISON AND CAPACITY:

- 128 functional prisons with the highest number of jails in Punjab at 43 prisons.
- Four functioning prisons specifically designated for women. Of the four, three functioning facilities are situated in Sindh at Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur, and one in Multan, Punjab. Otherwise, women are housed in separate barracks within male prisons.
- Five functioning facilities for juveniles, including Youth Offenders Industrial School (YOIS) and Borstal Institutes or Juvenile Reformatory Centres. Of the five, two juvenile facilities are located in Punjab in Faisalabad and Bahawalpur, and three are in Sindh situated in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur.

NUMBER OF JAILS IN EACH PROVINCE

NUMBER OF PRISONERS IN EACH PROVINCE

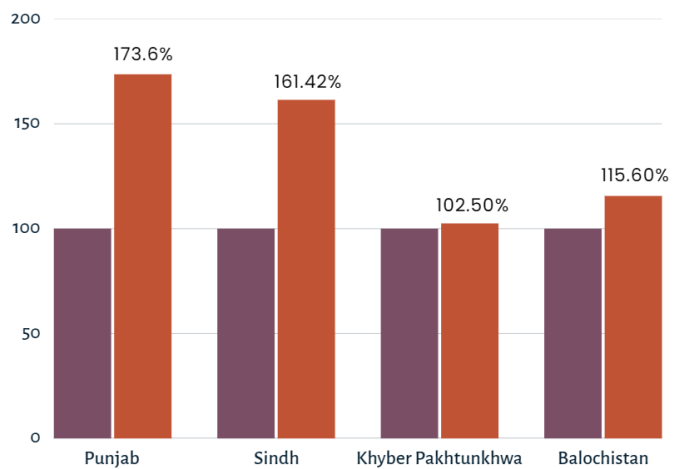


OPERATING CAPACITY

On a national level, prisons are operating at 152.9% capacity. In other words, overcrowding persists by 52.9% in Pakistan prisons.

Punjab jails are operating at 173.6% of their capacity, Sindh 161.42%, KP 102.50%, while Balochistan operates at 115.60% of its capacity.

OVERCROWDING ACROSS PAKISTAN'S JAILS



4.2 SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF UNDER-TRIAL DETAINEES

In every province, the number of under-trial prisoners exceeds the number of convicted inmates. A total of **74,918 under-trial prisoners** account for 73.41% of the total prison population – a significant 8% increase over the past eight years. This alarming trend reflects systemic issues such as ineffective bail mechanisms, prolonged judicial process, and an overreliance on custodial measures.

Measures to address overcrowding have included the establishment of a parole and probation service in Punjab, the introduction of a new Offender Management System, and the construction of additional jails. In Punjab, four new jails with a combined capacity of 2,268 inmates have been commissioned. However, the province currently holds 61,813 prisoners in facilities designed for only 37,217, highlighting the stark inadequacy of these measures. Building more jails, while costly and often ineffective, is unlikely to resolve the underlying issues driving Pakistan's rising prison populations.

Unless urgent steps are taken to reverse the trends of overcrowding and rising prison populations, Pakistan will remain unable to house prisoners in accordance with international human rights standards. Measures to address overcrowding must include the decriminalisation of poverty-related offences, the operationalisation of parole and probation systems and the adoption of non-custodial sentencing options for minor offences. Community-based alternative sentencing, such as community service, should be prioritized as a rehabilitative approach. Additionally, persons with psychosocial disabilities should

be diverted to mental health facilities, while individuals charged under the Control of Narcotics Substances Act (CNSA) for drug dependence should receive treatment rather than incarceration.

% OF PRE-TRIAL PRISONERS:

Punjab and KP did not report pre-trial prisoners (detenues) in 2024. However, Sindh reported 191 detenues, reflecting a 29.5% decrease from 2023, Balochistan previously reported 10 foreigners under pre-trial detention in 2023. Overall, pre-trial prisoners make less than 0.5% of the total prison population.¹¹

Notably, in its 2022 State report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Government of Pakistan stated that pre-trial detention is used solely as an exceptional measure, primarily in terrorism-related cases.¹² Both the UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (Tokyo Rules) and the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) emphasize the importance of alternatives to incarceration, particularly at the pre-trial stage. International law underscores that pre-trial detention should only be used when absolutely necessary and based on reasonable suspicion. Its overuse, as seen in Pakistan, exacerbates prison overcrowding and increases the risk of human rights violations.

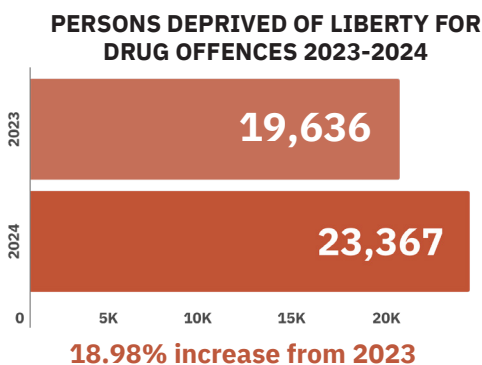
¹¹ Only two provinces reported the number of pre-trial detainees. The actual pre-trial detention rate is likely to be higher

¹² CCPR/C/PAK/2, para 85

4.3 SURGE IN DRUG-RELATED INCARCERATIONS

At least **23,367** individuals are imprisoned in Pakistan’s jails under the CNSA, accounting for 23.21% of the total prison population of Pakistan. Among the provinces, Punjab leads with the highest number of incarcerations for drug offences, with 13,331 cases accounting for 68.34% of the national total.¹³ (*The number for Punjab and Sindh has been shared by the respective prison inspectorates in July/August 2024, while the figure from KP and Balochistan is from JPP’s Narcotics Offences Dataset published in April 2024*).

Despite the abolition of the death penalty for drug offences, Pakistan’s narcotics regime remains excessively punitive. A **2022 Amendment to the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA)** introduced harsher penalties, expanded mandatory minimum sentencing thresholds, and critically, eliminated the possibility of parole, probation, and remissions for drug offenders, except for women and juveniles. This has directly contributed to a sharp increase in the prison population, with CNSA-related incarcerations rising by 18.98% – from 19,636 individuals in 2023 to 23,367 in 2024 .



The amendment has further fueled prison overcrowding, with the national prison population rising from 88,687 in 2022 to surpassing 100,000 in 2023 and 2024. The Inspector General of Punjab Prisons reported a **12,000-person** spike in the prison population within three months of the amendment’s enactment.¹⁴ Punjab now accounts for the largest share of narcotics-related incarcerations, with **13,331 prisoners** (29.94% of its prison population), followed by 3,606 in Sindh, 2,884 in KP, and 3,546 in Balochistan.

Ironically, while incarceration rates have surged, conviction rates under the CNSA have plummeted. In Punjab, convictions dropped from 16% in 2022 to just 2% in 2023. With 98% of cases resulting in no convictions, the system unjustly incarcerates individuals who are ultimately not found guilty.¹⁵

Additionally, the 2022 amendment introduced rigid mandatory minimum sentences removing judicial discretion even for minor offences involving small quantities of drugs. Previously, courts could impose probation instead of incarceration for minor drug offences, offering a pathway to avoid trial or prolonged undertrial detention. However, the new regime mandates undertrial imprisonment and longer sentences, disproportionately impacting individuals involved in low-level offences. This reliance on punitive measures exacerbates overcrowding and underscores a systemic preference for incarceration over reformatory or community-based approaches.

13 Justice Project Pakistan, Narcotics Offences Dataset (2024), <https://jpp.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Narcotics-Offences-Dataset.pdf>

14 Justice Project Pakistan, Post Event Report: Reimagining Justice: Public Health and Human Rights Policy (Apr. 2024), <https://jpp.org.pk/reimagining-justice-public-health-human-rights-centered-drug-policy/>

15 The Express Tribune, *Conviction Rate for Drug Cases Drop in Punjab*, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2468931/conviction-rate-for-drug-cases-drop-in-punjab#:~:text=LAHORE%3A,to%20just%20%25%20in%202023.>

4.4 INADEQUACY OF NON-CUSTODIAL MEASURES

In 2019, Punjab enacted the Probation and Parole Services Act, to facilitate the conditional release of eligible prisoners. However, the implementation of probation services has been severely hindered by chronic underfunding and understaffing, limiting its effectiveness in addressing prison overcrowding.

As of 2024, Punjab has 53 probation officers, including 13 women, managing approximately 36,015 probationers – 190 of whom are women and 247 juveniles. The province also employs 17 parole officers, including one woman. In 2024, only seven prisoners were released on parole. While Punjab supervises approximately 45,000 individuals through probation, indicating significant reliance on this measure compared to other provinces, the number of parolees remains relatively low across all provinces, highlighting the underutilization of parole as a rehabilitative avenue.

In Sindh, as of 2024, five male and 14 female probation officers oversee around 590 probationers including nine women. However, no prisoners were released on parole during the year, underscoring the limited impact of these mechanisms.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), as of 2024, employs 37 probation officers, including six women, supervising 7,183 probationers – 6,989 males, 36 females, and 158 juveniles. Additionally, the province recorded the highest parole usage, with 1,605 prisoners released on parole in 2024.

Nevertheless, the existing parole and probation systems remain grossly inadequate in addressing the severe levels of overcrowding in Pakistan's prisons. Moreover, the absence of community service as a recognised alternative to punishment further limits the potential for non-custodial sentencing options. Incorporating community service into the penal framework, alongside strengthening probation and parole systems, is essential to alleviate overcrowding and ensure more effective rehabilitation measures.



PUNJAB HAS
1 PROBATION OFFICER FOR EVERY 680 PROBATIONERS



SINDH HAS
1 PROBATION OFFICER FOR EVERY 31 PROBATIONERS



KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA HAS
1 PROBATION OFFICER FOR EVERY 194 PROBATIONERS

4.5 A GROWING DEATH ROW POPULATION

Following a period where Pakistan executed 516 people from 2014 to 2019, there have been no executions in Pakistan since December 2019. Despite this, the number of individuals on death row, which had significantly decreased during this period, has started to rise again, albeit slightly. In 2023, there were **3,604** inmates sentenced to death, and this number increased to **3,646** in 2024.¹⁶

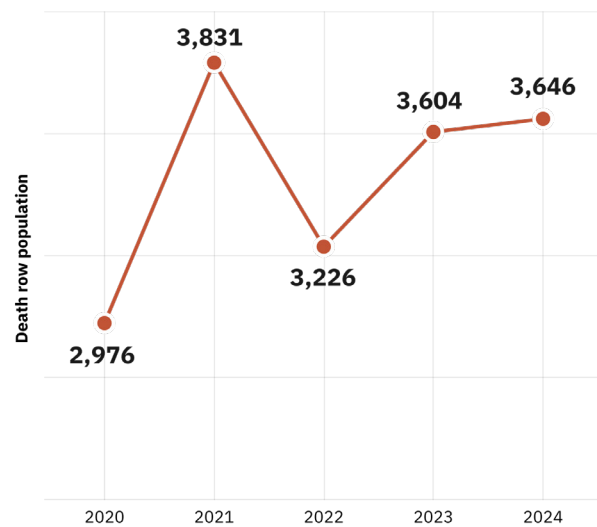
In 2014, a special Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa cleared thousands of pending criminal appeals, resulting in a drastic decrease of Pakistan’s death row from 7,164 in 2012 to lowest point at 2,976 in 2020.¹⁷ However, the recent upward trend points to the need for further judicial, legislative and administrative interventions to prevent further escalation.

While the Provincial High Courts are required to automatically review death sentences, an overburdened judiciary significantly delays the appeals process.¹⁸ This often results in prolonged periods of incarceration for defendants awaiting decisions on their appeals. Without targeted training for the judiciary on the stringent evidentiary standards established in Justice Khosa’s jurisprudence, as well as the requirements under the international human rights law and Pakistan’s treaty obligations, addressing the rise in death row numbers remains a formidable challenge.

% CHANGE IN PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW:

In 2023, there were 3,604 prisoners on death row, with women comprising 0.7% of those sentenced to death. In 2024, the death row population increased by 1.17% reaching a total of 3,646 prisoners.

DEATH ROW POPULATION OF PAKISTAN OVER THE YEARS



16 According to data received from the provinces, AJK, and GB IG Offices in November 2024. These figures reflect updated data compiled from all provinces. Previously, varying data labelling practices in provinces led to the tabulation of a higher number. For this report, Justice Project Pakistan collected death row figures from each provincial prison department through a standardised questionnaire instead of the performas previously provided by the provincial prison authorities, leading to the updated figures.

17 Justice Project Pakistan, Counting the Condemned, 04 Oct 2018, <https://jpp.org.pk/report/counting-the-condemned/>

18 Justice Project Pakistan, and International Human Rights Clinic: Yale Law School, A “Most Serious Crime”: Pakistan’s Unlawful Use of the Death Penalty (Sept., 2016), https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/schell/2016_09_23_pub_dp_report.pdf

5. NAVIGATING PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN PRISON REFORM

I. CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

- In April 2024, JPP’s client with psychosocial disabilities, Sheraz Butt, was violently strangled to death in Central Jail, Lahore by another prisoner also suffering from severe psychosocial disabilities. Sheraz’s appeal against his death sentence remained pending for eight years until his death, despite ample evidence of his serious mental illness.¹⁹
- In May 2024, Ghulam Abbas, one of the petitioners in the landmark Safia Bano case,²⁰ died at the Punjab Institute of Mental Health. He repeatedly complained of chest pain but received little to no medical attention and ultimately passed away in his cell at midnight, still in shackles.
- In October 2024, Central Jail Rawalpindi was closed to family and legal counsel visitation for over a month, raising significant human rights concerns for the inmates.

II. PROGRESS AND MILESTONES

- In January 2024, condemned prisoners in Punjab were granted access to call facilities, enabling them to connect with their families and the outside world — a significant development achieved through JPP’s advocacy efforts.
- In May 2024, while interpreting constitutional safeguards pertaining to juveniles, the Senior Puisne Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, reaffirmed Pakistan’s

¹⁹ According to Sheraz’s medical records from his treatment at the psychiatric cell of the Jail Hospital, he was visited seven times by psychiatrists from Punjab Institute of Mental Health (PIMH). The series of medical diagnosis and examinations carried out between the years 2013 and 2017 consistently pointed to Sheraz’s mental health as a classical representation of a patient suffering from schizophrenia.

²⁰ *Mst. Safia Bano v. Home Department*, Government of Punjab 37 PLD (SC) 10

international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). He emphasized the importance of protecting and rehabilitating juveniles who come into conflict with the law, noting that these obligations form the foundation of Pakistan’s juvenile justice system.²¹

- In August 2024, while hearing a criminal appeal filed by condemned prisoner Ghulam Shabbir, Supreme Court Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail highlighted the inhumane conditions and interminably long periods of time spent on death row. Ghulam Shabbir had spent 34 years in jail, including 24 years in a death cell. The judgement stated that having already served a life sentence, Shabbir could not be executed for the same offence or this would count as double punishment, and as such he was to be released. The judgement referenced the Mandela Rules and urged the Federal and Provincial Governments to minimise time spent on death row by aligning prison laws and rules with international standards, improving conditions for death row prisoners, and amending the procedure through which mercy petitions are filed before the President of Pakistan in line with international standards.²²
- In November 2024, the Honourable Chief Justice of Pakistan initiated a nationwide discussion to develop a comprehensive jail reform policy.²³

- Punjab introduced a policy in November 2024 to keep convicted prisoners in jails within their home districts, improving accessibility for families and legal counsel.²⁴
- A video trial system was installed in nine central jails and nine divisional anti-terrorism courts in Punjab, with plans to expand it to all remaining jails in the province in the coming years. The government believes this initiative is expected to reduce transportation costs for prisoner transfers and expedite the trial process.²⁵
- In October 2024, Balochistan government initiated the revision of their colonial-era prison laws, marking an important step toward modernizing the province’s prison system and aligning it with the UN minimum standards.

Pakistan’s incarceration rate stands at approximately 40 prisoners for every 100,000 individuals, reflecting low rate compared to global averages.²⁶

21 Mehran Vs Ubaid Ullah, etc.

22 Ghulam Shabbir and another vs. The State, https://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/downloads_judgements/crl.r.p._103_2017.pdf

23 The Express Tribune, *CJP expands prison reform*, 23 Nov 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2511299/cjp-expands-prison-reforms-to-k-p>

24 The Express Tribune, *Punjab Govt to confine prisoners in home districts*, 24 Nov 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2511522/punjab-govt-to-confine-prisoners-in-home-district-jails>

25 Rida Qazi vs. The Government of Punjab <https://sys.lhc.gov.pk/appjudgments/2024LHC6036.pdf>

26 The current population of Pakistan is 253,298,839 as of Monday, January 6, 2025, based on Worldometer’s elaboration of the latest United Nations data <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/pakistan-population>

6. DISAGGREGATED DATA: A CLOSER LOOK

A. 2024 IN NUMBERS

1

% CHANGE IN TOTAL PRISON POPULATION

1.66% increase in national prison population in Pakistan from 2023 reflecting an overall increasing trend

2

% OF PRISONERS WITH NARCOTICS OFFENSES

3.65% increase from 2023

3

% CHANGE OF JUVENILE DETAINEES

4.41% increase from 2023

4

% CHANGE OF FEMALE PRISONERS

2.8% increase from 2023

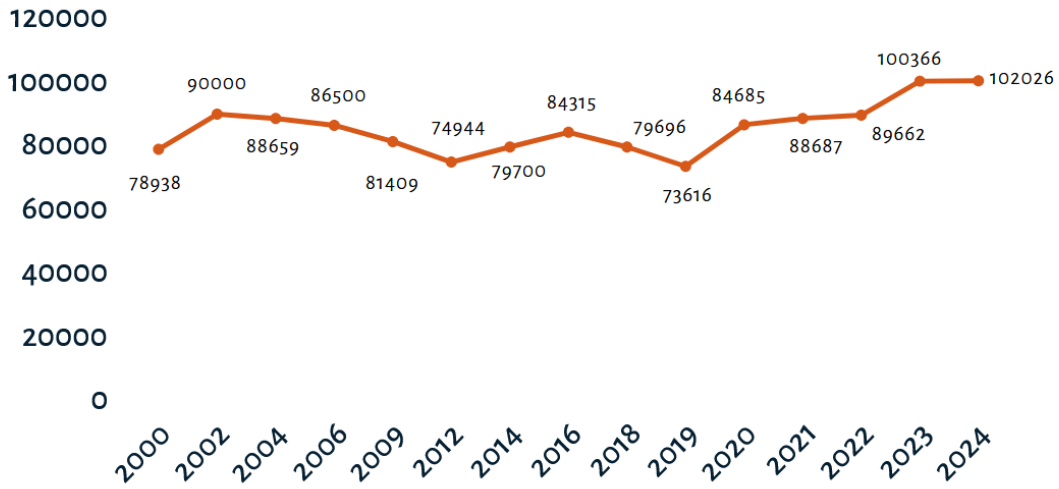
The percentage of female prisoners in Pakistan is 1.37%

5

% OF TRANSGENDER PRISONERS

There are **four transgender prisoners** in the Central Prison of Karachi in Sindh province, two of whom are under-trial and two are convicted. There is **one under-trial transgender prisoner** in the Central Prison of Mach in the Balochistan province.

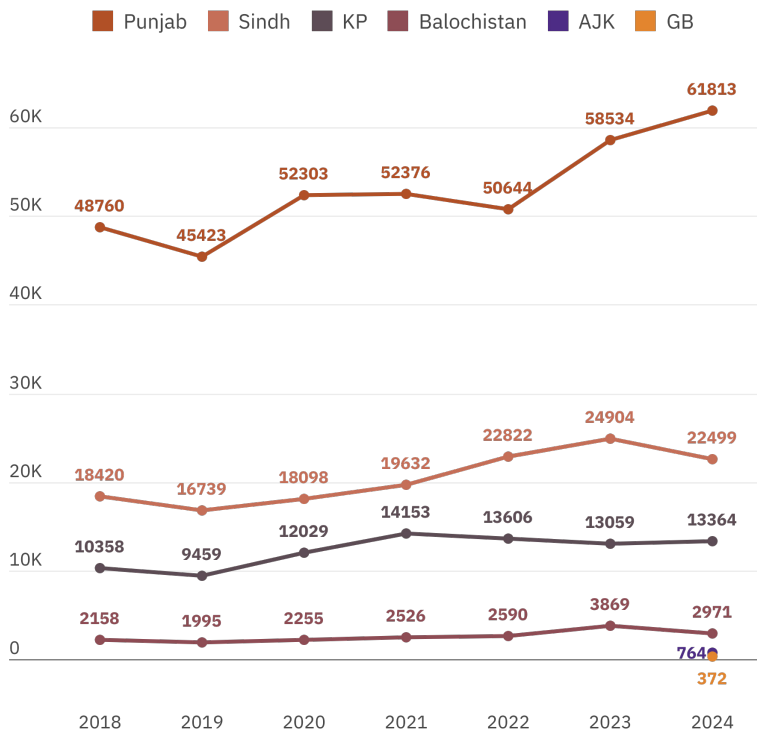
**NATIONAL PRISON POPULATION
2000-2024**



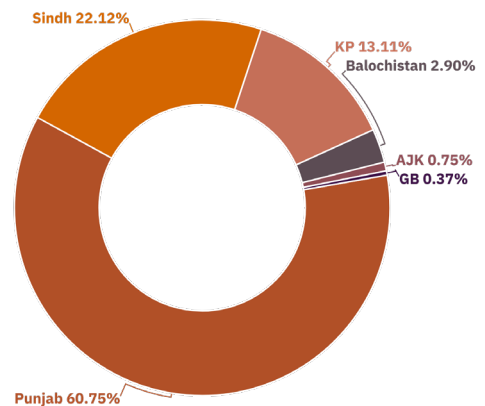
B. NUMBER OF PRISONERS BY PROVINCE

Punjab hosts the highest number of prisoners in the country, making up **60.7%** of the total prison population, followed by Sindh at **22.1%**, KP **13.1%**, Balochistan **2.9%**, AJK **0.75%**, and GB **0.37%**.

**PROVINCIAL PRISON POPULATION
2018-2024**

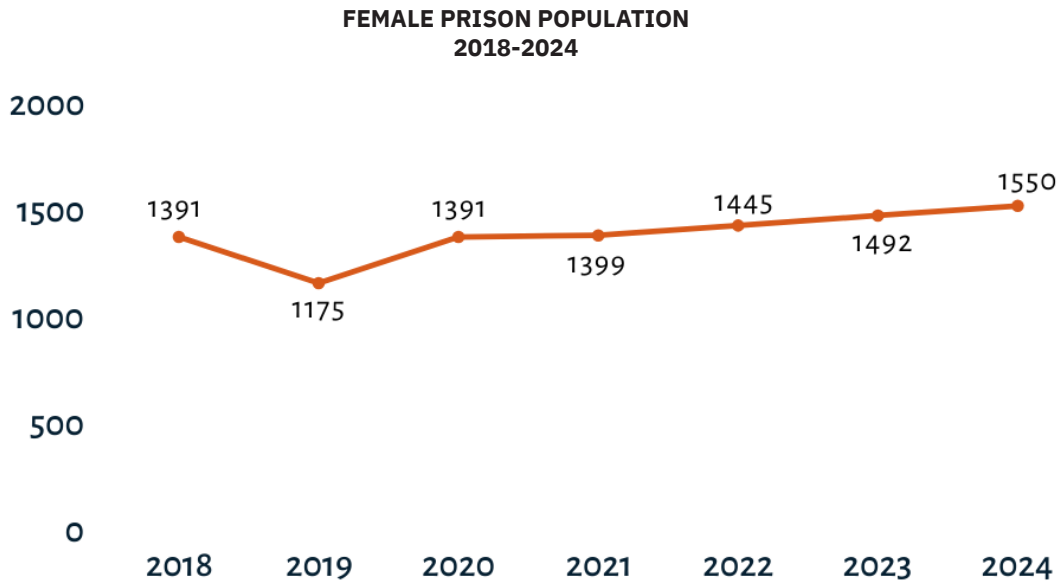


**PROVINCE-WISE POPULATION
BREAKDOWN**

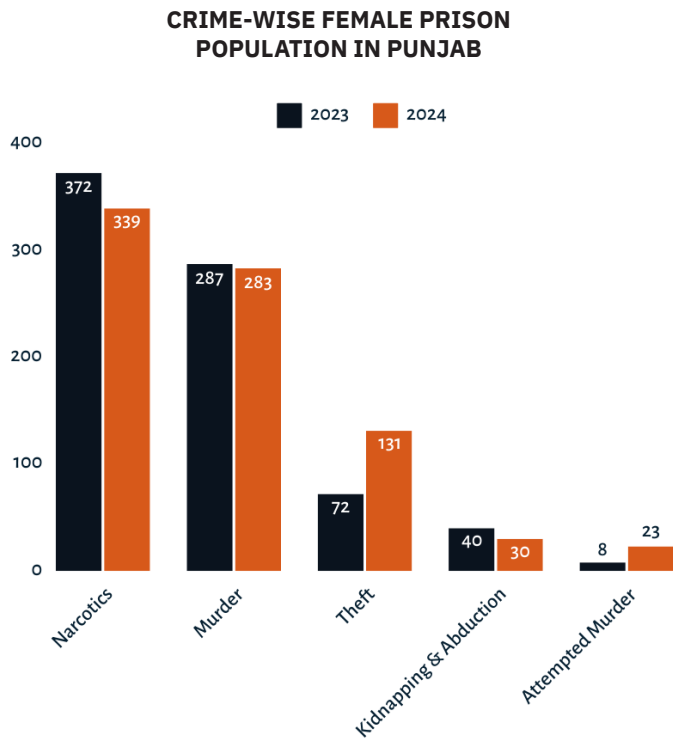
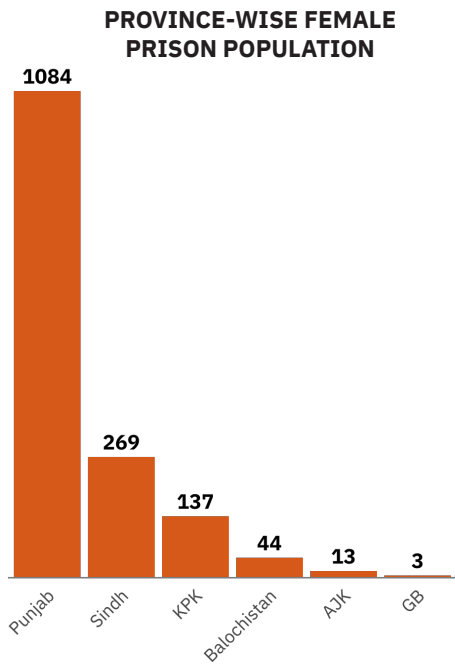


C. NUMBER OF PRISONERS BY GENDER

Pakistan’s prison population is predominantly male, with 1,550 female inmates making up ~1.5% of the total prison population in 2024. This trend has remained consistent over time as shown in the figure below. Since 2023, there has been a 2.8% increase in the female prison population. Among the total female prisoner population, 73.41% are under trial.



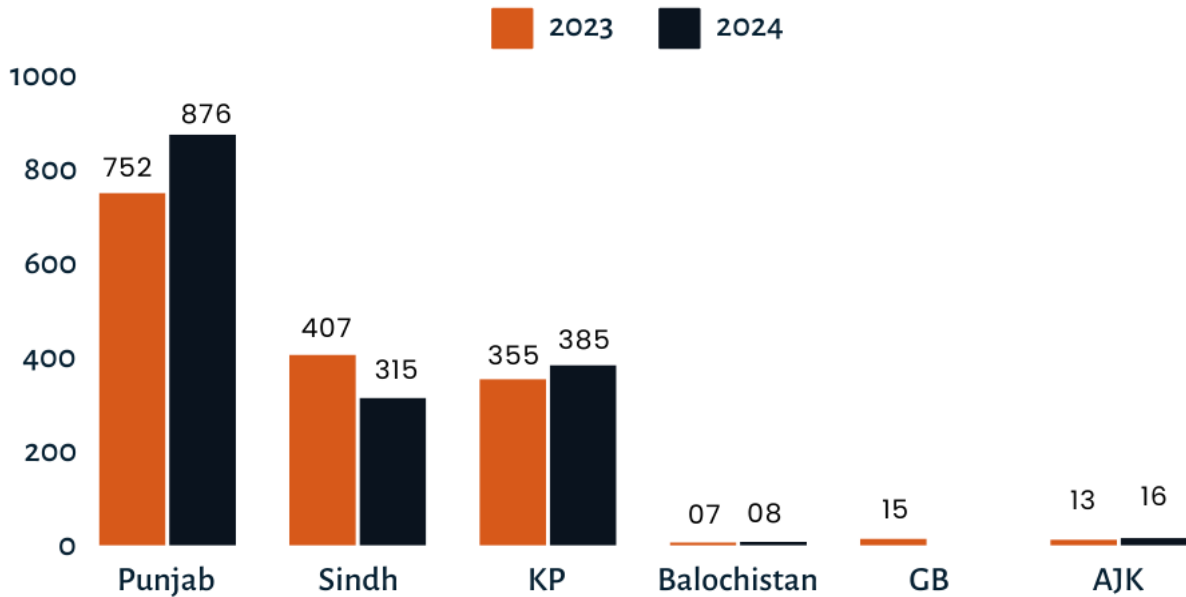
Data sourced from JPP's 2023 Data Dashboard



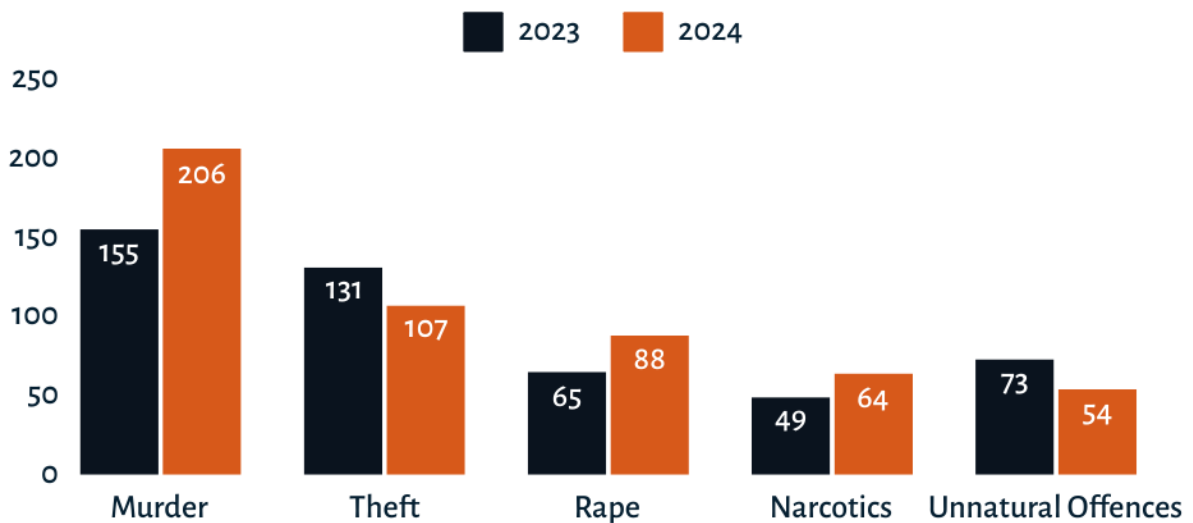
D. NUMBER OF JUVENILE PRISONERS

A total of 1,584 juveniles are currently imprisoned across Pakistan’s jails. Female juvenile prisoners constitute only 0.7% of the total juvenile prisoner population in 2024. Of the total juvenile population, 85.1% are under-trial, an increase from 86.3% in 2023.

PROVINCE-WISE JUVENILE PRISON POPULATION



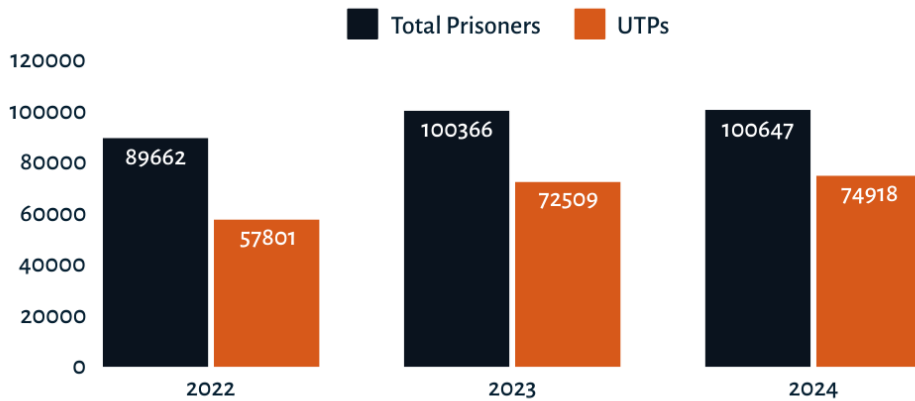
CRIME-WISE JUVENILE PRISON POPULATION IN PUNJAB



E. NUMBER OF PRISONERS BY TRIAL STATUS

In 2024, there were 74,918 prisoners under trial across four provinces, which make up 73.41% of the total prisoners. The trend in national UTPs (under-trial prisoners) largely emulates the trend in the total prisoner population of that given year.

PRISONER POPULATION BY TRIAL STATUS



PROVINCE-WISE PRISONER POPULATION BY TRIAL STATUS

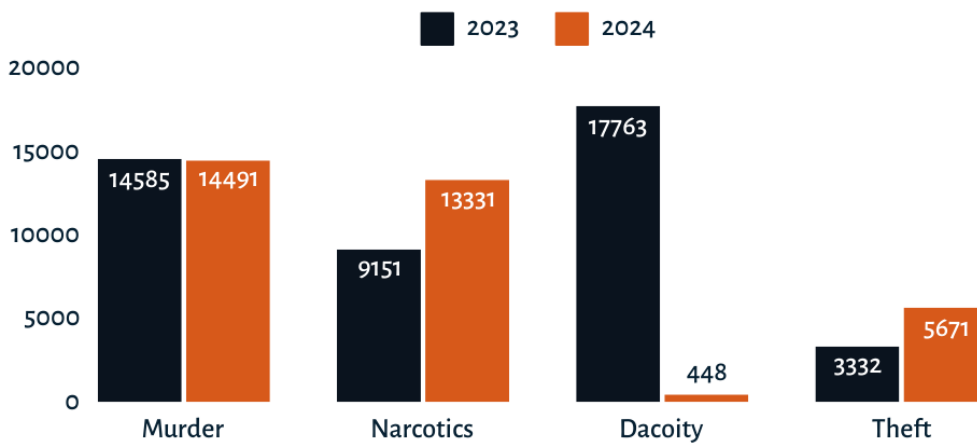


F. NUMBER OF PRISONERS BY OFFENCE OVER TIME

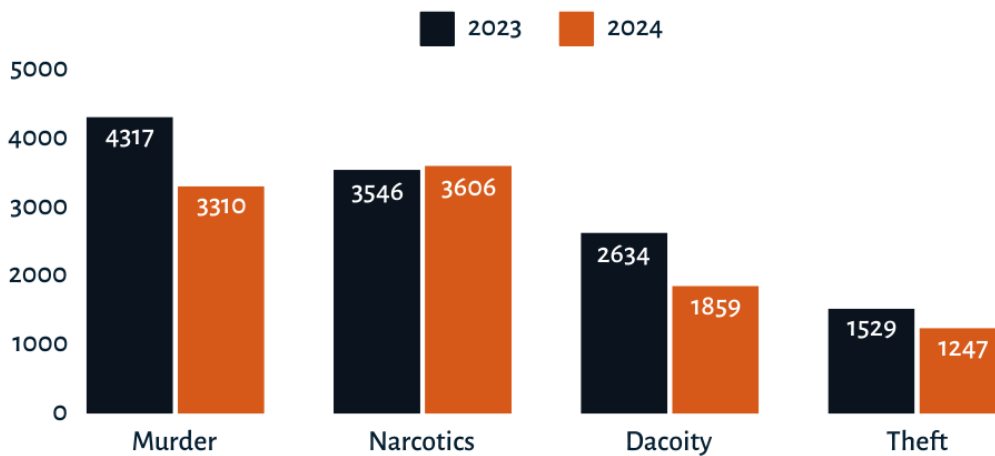
Prisoners incarcerated for narcotics offences increased between 2023 to 2024, with Punjab recording a significantly higher increase of 45.6% compared to Sindh. Conversely, the number of prisoners convicted for murder decreased in both provinces, with Sindh reporting a more notable decline of 23.3% from 2023.

In Balochistan, crime-wise data reveals that offences categorized under “Other” are approximately three times higher than those for murder and twice as high as those for dacoity. This raises critical questions about the classification and aggregation of crimes within the “Other” category.

PRISONER BY OFFENCE OVER TIME IN PUNJAB

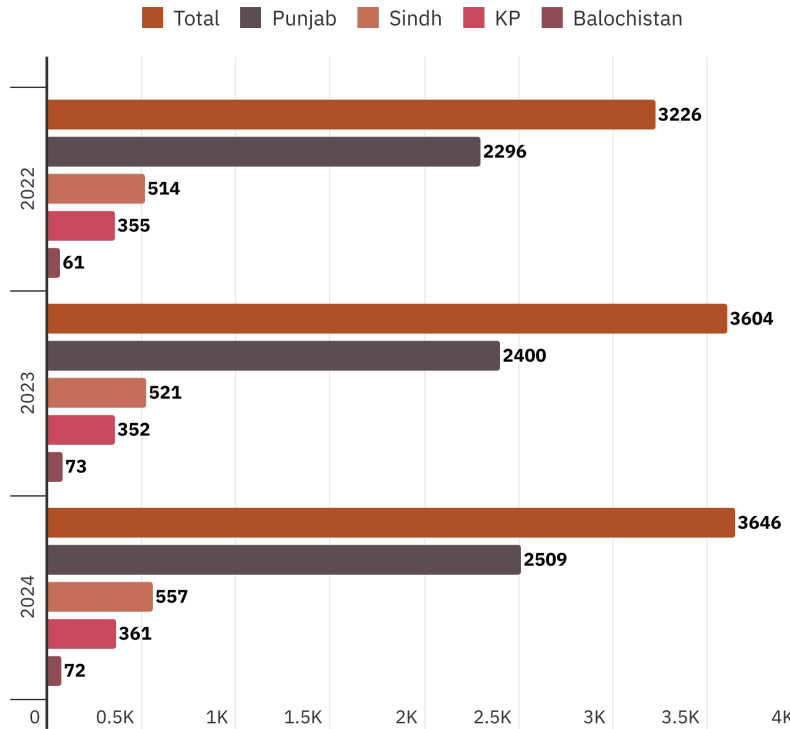


PRISONER BY OFFENCE OVER TIME IN SINDH

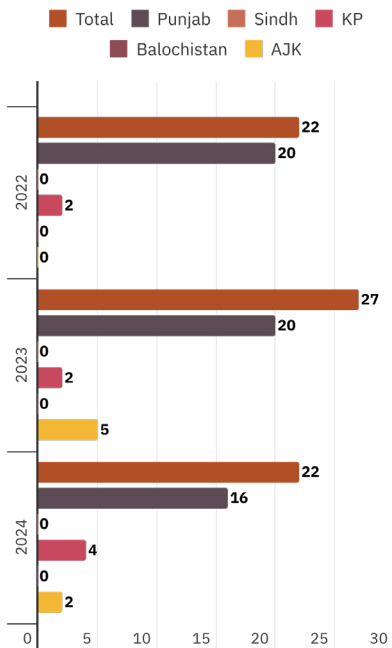


G. NUMBER OF DEATH ROW PRISONERS

DEATH ROW POPULATION BY PROVINCE
2022-2024

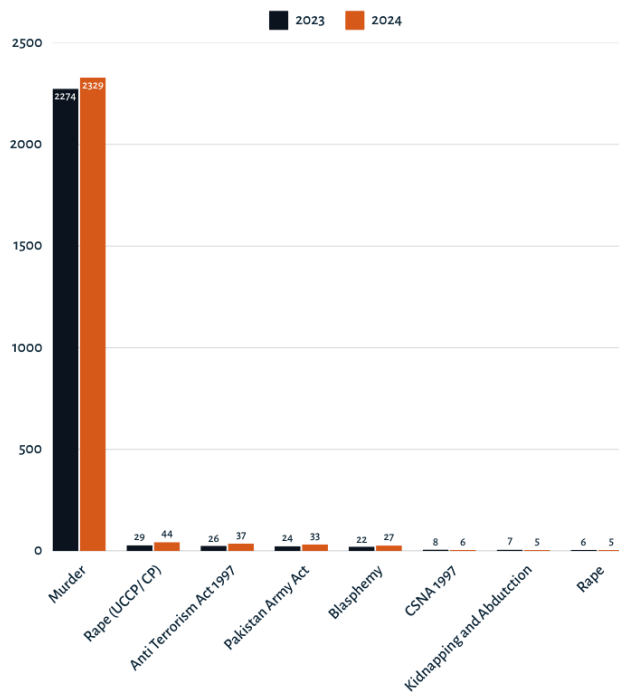


FEMALE DEATH ROW PRISONERS
BY PROVINCE



Sindh and Balochistan reported no female prisoners on death row since 2022

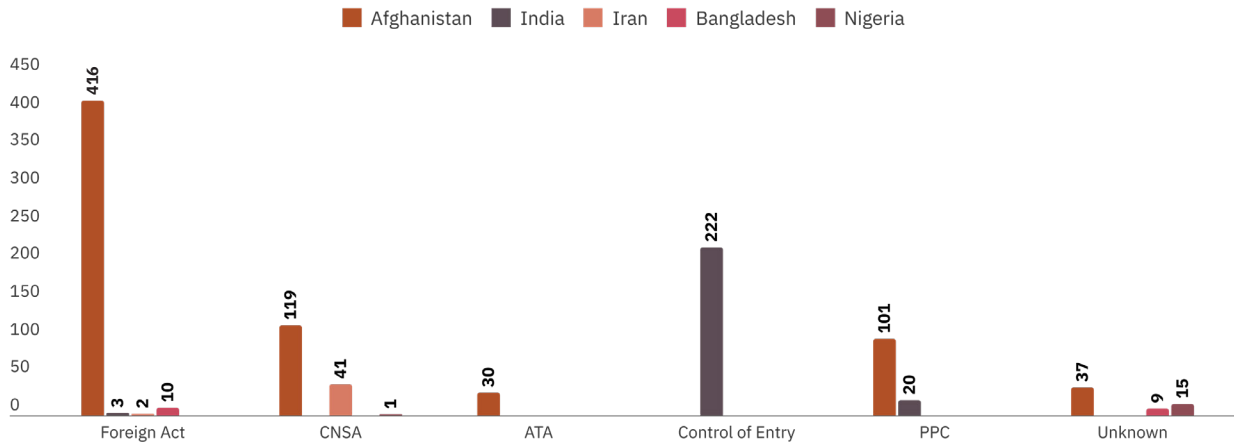
PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW BY
CRIME IN PUNJAB



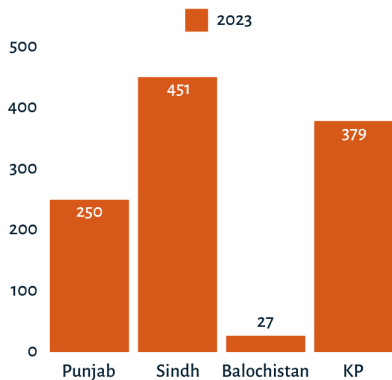
H. NUMBER OF FOREIGN PRISONERS

As of April 2024, there are 1,107 foreign nationals incarcerated across Pakistan’s prisons.²⁷

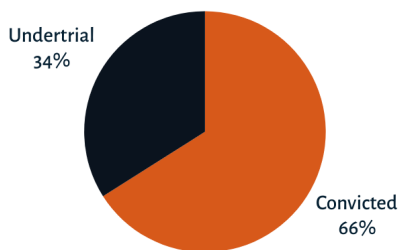
FOREIGN PRISONERS BY CRIME AND NATIONALITY



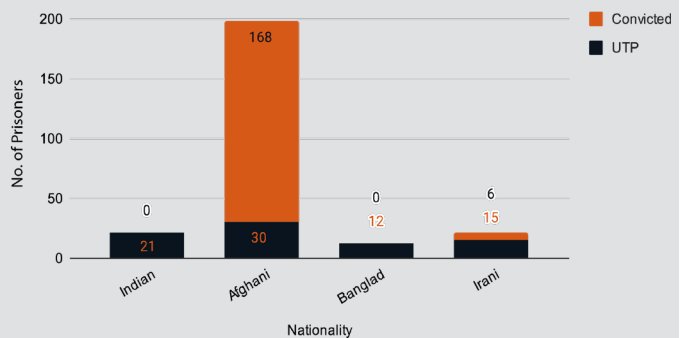
FOREIGN PRISONERS BY PROVINCE



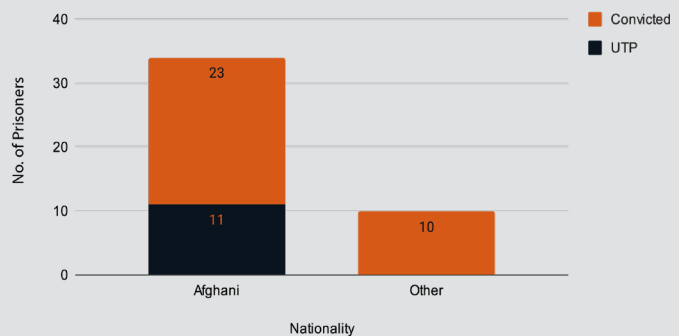
FOREIGN PRISONERS BY TRIAL STATUS



FOREIGN PRISONERS IN SINDH



FOREIGN PRISONERS IN BALOCHISTAN



For Sindh and Balochistan, the majority of foreign prisoners are of Afghan nationality at 77.65% of the total foreign prisoners.²⁸

27 National Commission for Human Rights and Justice Project Pakistan, Policy Brief: *Protecting the Rights of Foreign Nationals in Pakistan*, April 2024, <https://jpp.org.pk/report/protecting-the-rights-of-foreign-nationals-imprisoned-in-pakistan/>

28 According to updated data provided by the Prison Departments of Sindh and Balochistan in July and August 2024, respectively



In 2010, whilst imprisoned in Central Jail Faisalabad, death row prisoner Abdul Basit was subjected to extremely inhumane and unsanitary living conditions for a prolonged period. He became severely ill with a fever but did not receive medical attention for several weeks. His condition was so severe that he fell into a coma for approximately three weeks and he was eventually transferred to hospital, where he was diagnosed with TB meningitis. The illness, and the negligence of the jail authorities in treating him, caused him to lose all movement in his lower limbs, permanently confining him to a wheelchair.

7. PRISON CONDITIONS

Pakistan's prison conditions are characterised by severe overcrowding, insufficient food, inadequate medical care, and unsanitary conditions.²⁹ Neglect, deteriorating infrastructure, extremely poor sanitation and limited resources contribute to the inhumane living conditions that define the grim reality of Pakistan's prisons. With 102,026 prisoners housed in facilities designed for only **65,811** — a **55%** overcapacity rate — overcrowding remains one of the most pressing challenges.

Some cells designed for three people hold as many as 15 inmates, forcing prisoners to sleep in shifts due to the lack of floor space. A former death row prisoner from the District Jail in Mandi Bahauddin described the grim conditions: ***“Our cell was five feet wide and eight feet long. There is also a shower. It is very hard to sleep, since there were six other people. One's foot would be touching someone's head.”***³⁰

These conditions not only expose inmates to significant human rights violations but also fail to meet international standards set by the UN Human Rights Committee. During Pakistan's most recent review under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in October 2024, the Committee raised serious concerns about overcrowding and inadequate access to food, clean water, sanitation, feminine hygiene products, and healthcare in prisons.³¹ Additionally, the Committee expressed significant concern over the widespread use of prolonged pretrial detention, which continues to exacerbate the challenges within Pakistan's prison system.

29 U.S. State Department, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, available at [https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/#:~:text=see%20section%206\).-EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY,in%20Pakistan%20during%20the%20year.&text=The%20government%20rarely%20took%20credible,have%20committed%20human%20rights%20abuses](https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/#:~:text=see%20section%206).-EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY,in%20Pakistan%20during%20the%20year.&text=The%20government%20rarely%20took%20credible,have%20committed%20human%20rights%20abuses)

30 Justice Project Pakistan and Amnesty International, *Prisoners of the Pandemic: The Right To Health And Covid-19 In Pakistan's Detention Facilities*, August 2020, <https://jpp.org.pk/report/prisoners-of-the-pandemic/>

31 Human Rights Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan*, CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2, Available at, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=En&CountryID=131

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The State party should ensure that the conditions of detention fully comply with relevant international human rights standards (Nelson Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules and Tokyo Rules). It should, in particular:

- (a) Take immediate measures to significantly reduce overcrowding in prisons, improve the conditions of detention and ensure adequate access to food, clean water, sanitation, feminine hygienic products, and health care for persons held in all places of deprivation of liberty.
- (b) Ensure that allegations of abuse of women prisoners, including sexual violence, are duly investigated and that perpetrators are prosecuted and, if convicted, sanctioned with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime.
- (c) Consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
- (d) Refrain from holding individuals in solitary confinement for a prolonged period of time.
- (e) Reduce the use of pretrial detention and increase the use of non-custodial measures.
- (f) Consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and setting up a national preventive mechanism.

HEALTH, SANITATION, AND FOOD SECURITY

Overcrowded prison conditions result in inadequate food, water, sanitation, heating, ventilation, lighting, and medical care. Prisoners lack access to clean water, adequate bedding, and nutritious food, often relying on external family support or commissary purchases.

Field visits conducted by JPP to Central Jail Rawalpindi revealed alarming conditions among prisoners repatriated from Sri Lanka. Of the 51 male prisoners interviewed, 50 reported a lack of proper bedding or designated sleeping quarters. Disturbingly, all prisoners, including the sick and elderly, were subjected to long working hours with no consideration for their age or health.

8. THE NEED FOR AN UPDATED PRISON ADMINISTRATION FRAMEWORK

Punjab, home to 60.7% of the incarcerated population, operates under outdated prison rules from 1978 that fail to align with international standards. Efforts to revise these rules have repeatedly stalled. Two committees for prison reform, notified in 2020 and 2022, proposed amendments to over 12,000 provisions of the Prison Rules 1978 in line with international standards. However, the Draft Punjab Prison Rules 2020 and the revised Punjab Prison Rules 2022 remain unadopted by the Government of Punjab.

In its landmark ruling in *Safia Bano. vs Home Department*, the Supreme Court directed authorities to harmonize prison manuals across all provinces.³² The Draft Punjab Prison Rules 2020 and the revised Punjab Prison Rules 2022, which provide increased protections for prisoners with psychosocial disabilities, as well as an improved framework for their access to adequate care in line with the UN Minimum Standards, have yet to be passed by the Punjab Government and there have been no attempts to incorporate these revisions to the Pakistan Prison Rules 1978 at the federal level.

The Ministry of Interior's Prison Reform Committee is currently reviewing recommendations from its provincial

counterparts to revise and harmonize the Pakistan Prison Rules, aligning them with international standards at the federal level. It is imperative that these efforts result in the Punjab Government expediting its rule adoption and the Federal Government enacting unified, updated prison regulations that address systemic failures and comply with Pakistan's international obligations.

PREVIOUS PRISON REFORM EFFORTS

Some provincial authorities have revised the legal framework for the administration of prisons. Sindh revised its legal framework with the Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act 2019³³ and KP amended its prison rules with the Prisons Amendment Act, 2020,³⁴ aligning them more closely with international standards. However, Punjab, KP, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan continue to lag behind.

Over the past five years, several committees have been established to evaluate prison conditions and recommend reforms. In 2019, the Islamabad High Court established a Commission headed by the Federal Minister for Human Rights to investigate prison conditions and propose solutions. The

32 *Safia Bano v. Home Department, Government of Punjab* 37 PLD (SC) 10

33 Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act, 2019, Act No. X of 2019, <http://www.pas.gov.pk/uploads/acts/Sindh%20Act%20No.X%20of%202019.pdf>

34 Prisons Amendment Act, 2020, Act No. XLIII of 2020, <https://www.pakp.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/The-Prisons-Amendment-act-2020-Act-No.XLIII-of-2020-1.pdf>

Commission's report suggested measures to improve prison administration.³⁵

In the same year, then-prime minister Imran Khan constituted the Prime Minister's Prisoners Reforms Committee (PPAC) chaired by Senator Barrister Syed Ali Zafar. The committee recommended amending bail provisions to reduce under-trial prisoner populations, particularly in cases with sentences of less than three years.³⁶

In March 2020, a working group was formed by the Chief Minister of Punjab to review the Pakistan Prison Rules 1978 and propose amendments in line with the UN Minimum Standards.³⁷ The proposed amendments included updates such as chapters on prison health staff, psychologists, welfare officers, care for female, juvenile, and mentally ill prisoners, staff training, and complaint redressals. However, these revised rules remained unapproved.

In May 2020, a committee was formed to "Study and Investigate the Plight of Women in Pakistan's Prisons" by then-prime minister, chaired by the Federal Minister for Human Rights. On 26th August 2020, the Committee released its report recommending revision of the Prison Rules, reduction of under-trial prison population, and development of diversion-methods and rehabilitation of prisoners, and addressing individual cases of human rights abuse.³⁸

In 2022, the Chief Minister Punjab constituted a Committee to bring about reforms in prisons in Punjab.³⁹ The Committee proposed adopting the Draft Punjab Prison Rules prepared by the earlier Committee.

In April 2024, the Ministry of Interior established the National Committee for Prison Reforms to overhaul the Prison Rules 1978, in line with international standards like the Bangkok and Mandela Rules. The committee's mandate includes revising regulations for minor offences and pretrial detention to reduce overcrowding, digitising prison data, enabling audits by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), and proposing legislative reforms to modernise prison management.

In November 2024, Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi launched a comprehensive jail reform initiative to develop a National Jail Reform Policy aligned with international standards.⁴⁰ The effort focuses on addressing severe overcrowding, particularly in Punjab, and tackling prolonged under-trial detention through alternative sentencing options like community service and probation. A sub-committee was formed to inspect Punjab's jails and recommend reforms, including strategies to reduce overcrowding, improve inmate welfare, and introduce vocational training, mental health support, and educational programs for rehabilitation.

However, despite multiple efforts to reform Pakistan's prison management, the persistent failure to implement recommendations has rendered most initiatives ineffective. Several committees proposed revisions to the Pakistan Prison Rules but their adoption has continuously been stalled. Rather than building up on past efforts, each new committee starts afresh, wasting valuable time and resources. Passing these long-overdue revisions must be prioritised as the foundational step before embarking on further reforms.

35 Islamabad High Court in the matter titled *Khadim Hussain vs Federation of Pakistan* W.P. No. 4037 of 2019

36 The Express Tribune, *PM hails reform committee*, Feb 2020 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2154861/pm-hails-reforms-committee-finalising-report-ensuring-prisoners-rights>

37 The Express Tribune, *Government to expedite jail reform*, Rana Yasif, March 03, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2287186/govt-to-expedite-jail-reforms>

38 Government of Pakistan Ministry of Human Rights, *Plight of Women in Pakistan's Prisons Report* (August 2020), https://portal.mohr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Prison-Report_acknowledgment.pdf

39 Chief Minister's Office, Punjab Notification: No.PS/SCM(Impl)/CMO/22/OT-47/ Constitution of Committee for Prison Reforms

40 The Express Tribune, *Chief Justice Afridi launches jail reform*, Nov 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2507055/chief-justice-afridi-launches-jail-reforms>



Kanizan Bibi remains indefinitely confined at the Punjab Institute of Mental Health (PIMH), despite having completed her life sentence. Arrested in 1989 and convicted based on a confession extracted through brutal torture, she has spent over three decades behind bars, first in prison and then at PIMH. In the landmark Safia Bano judgment, the Supreme Court acknowledged that she had served her full sentence and directed a fresh medical evaluation by a qualified board of psychologists and psychiatrists to assess her fitness for release. However, the board convened on 17.02.2022, comprising seven members did not include any psychologists, as directed by the Supreme Court. Today, Kanizan remains in legal and medical limbo, longing for freedom while her family stands ready to support and care for her. Kanizan Bibi has been trapped in the justice system for 35 years, with no clear path to freedom despite completing her life sentence.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data presented underscores a systemic failure to address the root causes of Pakistan's prison crisis, perpetuating cycles of over-incarceration and human rights violations. A steadily increasing prison population and overcrowding has overwhelmed the system and left it incapable of meeting the needs of those it detains. This failure is compounded by outdated regulations, particularly in Punjab, where the outdated 1978 Prison Rules continue to govern conditions for over 60% of the country's incarcerated population.

Overcrowding, prolonged undertrial detention, and overuse of arrest and detention are not only logistical challenges but also violations of fundamental rights. The stark gap between the international standards, inconclusive reform efforts and the realities on the ground demonstrates the State's inability to prioritise meaningful reforms.

Immediate action is needed to align Pakistan's prison administration with the UN minimum standards. Key measures include implementing non-custodial alternatives, detention monitoring and oversight by an independent body such as the National Commission for Human Rights, instituting a safe and secure complaint mechanism, and updating and standardising the Pakistan Prison Rules across all provinces and at federal level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Revise and Standardise Legal Frameworks**
Revise and standardise the legal frameworks governing prisons at both provincial and federal levels to incorporate international standards, including the UN Minimum Standards. Special focus should be placed on provisions addressing food, sanitation, mental health, and protections for vulnerable individuals.
- 2. Implement Effective Monitoring**
Operationalise mechanisms for regular detention monitoring, including unannounced inspections and independent visits by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) to ensure compliance with human rights standards.
- 3. Introduce Non-Custodial Alternatives**
Amend Pakistan Penal Code to incorporate community service programs in types of punishment, as an alternative to incarceration. Increase the availability of probation, parole and remissions, and decriminalisation of petty offences and poverty.

4. Enhance Mental Health Services through Updated Prison Rules

Assign mental health professionals, employed under provincial health departments rather than prison administrations, to provide mental health services to inmates across all provinces. Update the Prison Rules to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of these professionals, with a particular focus on supporting prisoners on death row.

5. Address Torture and Abuse in Prisons

Implement measures to eliminate torture in prisons, and establish a confidential, impartial, and effective complaint mechanism for prisoners to report abuse, violence, and harsh treatment. Ensure these mechanisms are monitored by NAPA and the National Commission for Human Rights to uphold accountability and compliance with international human rights standards

6. Strengthen Probation and Parole Systems

Enhance the capacity of the probation and parole department, implement non-carceral measures aligned with international standards, and reform the pre-trial detention and bail structures to effectively reduce prison overcrowding.

7. Develop Specialized Facilities for Mental Health Care

Establish regional psychiatric wards or forensic hospitals for prisoners with psychosocial disabilities, following the Supreme Court's guidelines in *Safia Bano Vs. The State (PLD 2021 SC 488)*. These facilities should provide targeted care and rehabilitation in a humane environment.

8. Create Prison Tribunals for Efficient Redressal

Establish specialised Prison Tribunals to function as a one-stop forum for addressing prisoner grievances, reducing the burden on the judicial system while ensuring timely and effective resolution of complaints.

9. Reform Juvenile Justice

Implement diversion measures for juveniles across all provinces in accordance with the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018 (JJSA), UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC), and UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules), focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

10. Repeal the 2022 CNSA Amendment

Repeal the 2022 Amendment to the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) which stripped the individuals charged with drug-related offences of eligibility for parole, probation, and remission in order to reduce overcrowding. Introduce proportional sentencing measures to prevent overcrowding caused by excessively punitive narcotics laws.

