



CENTRE FOR VOTERS INITIATIVE & ACTION

Pakistan

NGO Submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, & Cultural Rights

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Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action presents this report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ahead of the 80th Session for the review of Pakistan. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
3. The Centre presents this submission ahead of the 80th session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the 'Committee'), where it will consider Pakistan's second periodic report. This report is framed by the rights protected under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ('the Covenant'). We encourage Committee members to understand civic education, guaranteed by Article 13(1), as a foundational tool for addressing the violations outlined below: people who are not taught their rights, cannot reach a school, or cannot obtain information are unable to claim any other Covenant right.
4. The Centre has submitted this report to the Committee to focus on four specific violations: (1) barriers to education and civic learning; (2) restrictions on human security and civic freedom; (3) forced and early marriages as a barrier to education and economic autonomy; and (4) shrinking civic space restricting the enjoyment of Covenant rights. A complete list of recommendations is at the end of this submission. We hope that the Committee will consider including some of these recommendations in its concluding observations to the State party.

Barriers to Education and Civic Learning

Mass removal of Afghan students disrupting educational access

5. Pakistan is removing enrolled students from higher education solely on the basis of their nationality. On 1 September 2026, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council ordered universities and colleges to send enrolled Afghan students home; by the regulator's own count, more than 200 Afghan students are enrolled in medical and dental colleges.¹ King Edward Medical University in Lahore directed 20 students, including four women and seven in their final year, to report within 24 hours to complete departure formalities, and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimates that about 100 students in Lahore alone may be affected.²

¹ AL JAZEERA, « 'I want to cry': Afghan medical students in Pakistan face expulsion fear », (11 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

² HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Pakistan Moves to Expel Afghan Medical Students*, (9 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

6. The order forms part of a wider campaign of removals of Afghan nationals, which UN experts have urged Pakistan to halt.³ Although a court has temporarily suspended the directive,⁴ and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains that only students without valid documents must leave, the threat of expulsion persists.⁵ For the women concerned, return is not an interruption but an end to their education, as the Taliban bar women from universities and medical training.⁶
7. Article 13(2)(c) of the Covenant requires that higher education be made equally accessible to all on the basis of capacity, and the Committee has confirmed that the prohibition of discrimination extends to non-nationals, irrespective of their legal status.⁷ Removing a final-year student because of her passport cannot be reconciled with that standard.

Recommendation I	
1.	We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan how many Afghan students have been removed or de-registered since 1 September 2026, and on what legal basis.
2.	We encourage the Committee to recommend, in its concluding observations, that Pakistan withdraw the directive, restore the enrolment of every affected student and lift the suspension of new admissions, so that the more than 200 students concerned are able to complete their degrees. No enrolled student should be removed without an individual assessment of protection needs, particularly those of women.

Severe regional disparities in educational access, particularly in Balochistan

8. Access to education in Pakistan is determined by geography. The Government's own Economic Survey 2025-26 records that 28 per cent of school-age children are out of school nationally, but 45 per cent in Balochistan, where female literacy in rural areas stands at 25 per cent.⁸ Only 3 per cent of girls in Balochistan are enrolled at matriculation level, and 0.3 per cent of the province's primary schools have toilets.⁹ Literacy stands at 68 per cent in Punjab and 49 per cent in Balochistan.¹⁰

³ OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *Pakistan must stop removals of Afghans at risk of torture and other serious human rights violations*, (September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁴ See *supra*, note 1.

⁵ KHAAMA PRESS, « UN Experts Urge Pakistan to Reverse Expulsion Order for Afghan Medical Students », (September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁶ See *supra*, note 2.

⁷ UN COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, *General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13)*, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10, (8 December 1999), ¶34.

⁸ PAKISTAN TODAY, « Economic Survey raises concerns over Pakistan's demographic dividend », (12 June 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ SIDDIQUI Shahid, « Education Spending: The Declining Trend Persists », *The Friday Times*, (27 June 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

9. These deficits are compounded by insecurity that reaches into classrooms. In August 2026, a suspension of mobile and internet services in Quetta disconnected students from online classes and learning platforms.¹¹ In the same month, the Human Rights Council of Balochistan reported five Baloch students (University of Karachi) were taken from their residence during a raid, whereabouts unknown,¹² and in May 2026 teachers/students across Balochistan's universities protested the disappearances.¹³
10. A student who fears abduction, or whose teacher has disappeared, does not enjoy an education that is accessible in fact. This pattern engages Article 13 read with Article 2(2), together with the academic freedom that the Committee has held to be inseparable from the right to education.¹⁴

Recommendation II
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan to provide enrolment, completion and education budget data disaggregated by province, district and sex.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan adopt a costed, time-bound plan to bring Balochistan's out-of-school rate down to the national average, beginning with water, sanitation and electricity in every public school. Pakistan should also investigate all reported disappearances of students and academics and publish the outcome, so that campuses are safe places of learning.

Sustained decline in public investment in education

11. Pakistan is disinvesting from education at the moment its education indicators are weakest. According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, education expenditure for July-March fell from Rs 899,619 million in 2024-25 to Rs 356,499 million in 2025-26, a reduction of more than 60 per cent in a single year.¹⁵ This is not an isolated incident: spending declined from 2.0 per cent of GDP in 2018-19 to 0.8 per cent in 2024-25, against a repeated commitment to allocate 4 per cent.¹⁶
12. The consequences are visible in schools, of which only 65 per cent have electricity and 77 per cent have toilets.¹⁷ Under Article 2(1), Pakistan must use the maximum of its available resources, and the Committee applies a strong presumption against retrogressive measures in relation to the right to education.¹⁸ A cut of this scale is retrogressive on its face, and the burden rests on the State party to justify it.

¹¹ ANI, « Mobile, internet shutdown in Quetta disrupts daily life, affecting students, healthcare workers, businesses », *The Tribune*, (11 August 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

¹² IANS, « Seven Baloch students forcibly disappeared by Pakistani forces in Karachi », *The Hawk*, (6 August 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

¹³ OUTLOOK INDIA, « Enforced Disappearances of Balochistan Academics Trigger Black Day Protests and Demand for State Action », (20 May 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

¹⁴ See *supra*, note 7 at ¶138-40.

¹⁵ See *supra*, note 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See *supra*, note 7 at ¶145.

Recommendation III
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan to explain the reduction in education expenditure recorded in its Economic Survey 2025-26, and which alternatives were considered before it was made.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan adopt a time-bound path to its own commitment of 4 per cent of GDP, with annual published benchmarks, and protect education from fiscal consolidation, so that the decline is reversed before the next periodic report.

High learning poverty among enrolled children

13. Enrolment in Pakistan does not guarantee learning. The World Bank estimates that 75 per cent of ten-year-olds cannot read and understand a simple text, a figure estimated to have risen to 79 per cent once the pandemic and recent floods are accounted for.¹⁹ More than 25 million children remain out of school altogether.²⁰

14. The system also fails to retain those who enter it: net enrolment falls from 54 per cent at primary level to 23 per cent at middle level and 16 per cent at matriculation, and mean years of schooling stand at 4.3.²¹ Pakistan's Human Capital Index of 0.41 means that a child born today will attain 41 per cent of her potential productivity.²² Article 13(1) guarantees an education that enables all persons to participate effectively in a free society; a child who completes primary school unable to read has been denied it.

Recommendation IV
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan what measurable targets it has set for foundational literacy and numeracy, and by what date.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan conduct a national assessment of reading and numeracy at the end of primary school, publish the results annually by province and sex, and direct teacher training to the districts that perform worst, so that learning poverty is measurably reduced by the next review.

Absence of civic and human rights education in school curricula

15. Pakistan's curricula do not equip students to know or to claim their rights. Whilst Article 13(1) provides that education shall strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, research on Pakistani policy documents and textbooks finds

¹⁹ WORLD BANK, *Pakistan - Human Capital Review: Building Capabilities Throughout Life*, (2023). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²⁰ THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, « 4% of GDP: the promise Pakistan still refuses to meet », (May 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²¹ See *supra*, note 10.

²² See *supra*, note 19.

that the teaching of human rights is not formally included in curricula,²³ and a 2025 analysis of primary school textbooks found a lack of explicit human right discussion, alongside the under-representation of women, girls and religious minorities.²⁴

- 16.** Without civic education, citizens cannot understand the institutions that govern them, vote in an informed way, or hold authorities to account for the deprivations described in this report. The Centre regards this gap as the root from which the other violations grow.

Recommendation V
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan whether, and at which levels, human rights and civic education form part of the national curriculum, and how they are assessed.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan integrate human rights and civic education as a compulsory, assessed component of primary and secondary schooling, and review textbooks with the participation of civil society, so that every student leaving school has been taught the rights the Covenant guarantees.

Restrictions on Human Security and Civic Freedom

Intimidation and harassment of journalists

- 17.** Journalists in Pakistan work under threat. Freedom Network documented eight cases against journalists and media practitioners in August 2026 alone, including death threats, legal action, and attacks on journalists' homes and family members.²⁵ On 9 August 2026, Imtihan Shahid, Executive Editor at Khabrain Media Group in Lahore, received death threats, threats against his family and threats to bomb the newspaper's offices.²⁶ In July 2026, six of eleven documented cases involved legal action under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) or cybercrime investigations, and State actors were suspected in seven.²⁷

- 18.** Journalism is work, and Article 7(b) guarantees safe and healthy working conditions to those who perform it. Where the State is itself a suspected source of the threat, it fails both its duty to respect and its duty to protect. The harm extends beyond the profession: the public loses the information on which the monitoring of every Covenant right depends.

²³ UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY (OPUS), « Teaching Human Rights in Pakistani Schools: What Are the Potential Barriers? », (2019). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²⁴ PARVEEN N., RODRIGUES G., ZAINULABIDIN N. & ASHRAF D., « Human rights education in primary school textbooks: insights from Pakistan », *Human Rights Education Review*, vol. 8, n° 2, (2025). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²⁵ FREEDOM NETWORK, Threats, Attacks and Legal Pressure Continue Against Journalists Across Pakistan: FN Monthly Report August 2026, (11 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ JOURNALISMPAKISTAN, « Six of 11 journalist threat cases linked to PECA, NCCIA: Report », (18 August 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

Recommendation VI
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan how many threats and attacks against journalists documented in 2026 have led to an investigation or prosecution.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan ensure that the safety commission envisaged under the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021 is functional, adequately resourced and publishes annual data on complaints received and resolved, so that threats are investigated rather than merely recorded.

Restrictions on independent media

- 19.** Independent reporting from most of Pakistan now requires government permission. Under the Foreign Media Facilitation Guidelines, 2026, anyone working for international media, including freelancers and fixers, must obtain a No Objection Certificate from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting before reporting outside Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi.²⁸ The requirement extends to Pakistani nationals, and it is unclear how long approval will take, which may prevent timely coverage of major events.²⁹
- 20.** The areas placed behind this barrier, including Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are those where the deprivations documented in this report are most acute. A rule that gates access to them shields those deprivations from scrutiny and restricts the public's access to information on the realisation of Covenant rights.

Recommendation VII
We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan withdraw the No Objection Certificate requirement or, at a minimum, fix a maximum processing period of three working days, provide written reasons for any refusal and establish a right of appeal, so that urgent reporting cannot be blocked by administrative silence.

Risk of criminalisation surrounding false or misleading information

- 21.** Vague criminal law now governs what may be said online. Amendments to PECA in 2025 created an offence of spreading information deemed 'false or fake' and likely to cause fear, panic or unrest, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of two million rupees, or both.³⁰ Freedom Network reports that such loosely defined provisions have been widely deployed, creating a chilling effect across the media.³¹

²⁸ PAKISTAN TODAY, « Govt makes NOC mandatory for foreign media to travel beyond major cities », (4 August 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

²⁹ THE NATION, « Foreign Media Restrictions », (21 August 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³⁰ ARAB NEWS, « What Pakistan's newsrooms leave off the plate », (September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³¹ ANI, « Pakistan's media freedom under severe threat as legal curbs, violence and economic pressure intensify: Freedom Network report », (30 April 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

- 22.** Between June 2021 and June 2026, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority blocked 495,747 URLs.³² A law that does not define falsity leaves that judgement to the authorities, and exposes anyone who reports on failures in health, education or livelihoods to prosecution. Having constrained mainstream media, the State is extending the same control to digital platforms.

Recommendation VIII	
1.	We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan how many persons have been investigated or prosecuted under the false information offence since January 2025, and how many of them are journalists.
2.	We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan repeal the offence or define it narrowly and remove custodial penalties, so that reporting on the realisation of Covenant rights does not carry a risk of imprisonment.

Media self-censorship

- 23.** The cumulative result is silence. In a survey of 156 Pakistani journalists, 88 per cent reported self-censorship in their professional work and 79 per cent in their personal online activity, most often on religious and security matters.³³ Research further indicates that most journalists are not trained in digitally safe and encrypted communication.³⁴
- 24.** These findings predate the 2025 PECA amendments and the 2026 Guidelines; the environment has since become more restrictive, not less. Self-censorship is not a private choice but the predictable consequence of the measures described above, and it deprives the public of information before any censor intervenes.

Forced and Early Marriages as a Barrier to Education and Economic Autonomy

Inconsistent minimum marriage age across provinces

- 25.** A girl's protection from child marriage in Pakistan depends on the province in which she lives. Sindh set 18 as the minimum age for both sexes in 2013, Balochistan and the Islamabad Capital Territory followed in 2025, and the Punjab Assembly passed the Child Marriage Restraint Bill on 27 April 2026.³⁵ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan still operate under a law written in 1929, under which girls may be married at 16.³⁶

³² JOURNALISMPAKISTAN, « The State of Pakistan Media: August 2026 », (September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³³ MEDIA MATTERS FOR DEMOCRACY, *Surrendering to Silence: An Account of Self-censorship among Pakistani Journalists*, (3 May 2018). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³⁴ JAMIL Sadia, « Red lines of journalism: digital surveillance, safety risks and journalists' self-censorship in Pakistan », *Journalist Safety and Self-Censorship*, Routledge, (2020). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³⁵ EQUALITY NOW, « Q&A with Qamar Naseem from Blue Veins Pakistan on child marriage and the latest bill passed by the Punjab Assembly », (April 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³⁶ MAHMOOD Amjad, « Punjab Assembly passes bill setting minimum marriage age at 18 for both males and females », *Dawn*, (27 April 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

- 26.** More than 18 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18, rising to 29 per cent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the law remains unreformed.³⁷ The disparity invites circumvention: minority girls have allegedly been taken from Sindh to Punjab to evade Sindh's stricter law.³⁸ In January 2026, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended a minimum age of 18 for both sexes, without exception, throughout the country.³⁹ Article 10(1) requires that marriage be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses, which a child cannot give, and a lower minimum age for girls than for boys is incompatible with Article 3.

Recommendation IX	
1.	We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan for its timeline for reform in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.
2.	We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for both sexes, without exception, in every province and territory across all personal law: a single national standard removes incentive to move girls across provinces.

Early marriage as a driver to school dropout

- 27.** Child marriage ends girls' education. Pakistan has an estimated 19 million child brides, the sixth highest number globally, and only 13 per cent of married girls finish secondary school, compared with 44 per cent of their unmarried peers.⁴⁰ The effect is visible in national outcomes: female literacy stands at 54 per cent against 73 per cent for males, and at 44 per cent in rural areas.⁴¹
- 28.** The relationship runs in both directions: a girl out of school is more likely to be married, and a married girl rarely returns. Each child marriage therefore engages Article 13 as well as Article 10, and the loss of education forecloses the economic autonomy that Article 6 protects.

Recommendation X	
1.	We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan for data on the number of girls leaving school on account of marriage or pregnancy, by province.
2.	We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan guarantee married and pregnant girls the right to return to school, and expand stipends conditional on girls' secondary attendance in the districts with the highest rates of child marriage, so that the secondary completion rate of married girls rises above 13 per cent.

³⁷ See *supra*, note 35.

³⁸ EURASIA REVIEW, « Pakistan: New Law Could Limit Forced Marriages Of Minority Girls – OpEd », (19 February 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

³⁹ EQUALITY NOW, « Pakistan's progress on child marriage is being challenged in court, again », (July 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁴⁰ UNICEF PAKISTAN, *UNICEF launches child marriage campaign with National Ambassador Saba Qamar*, (28 May 2025). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁴¹ See *supra*, note 10.

Forced religious conversion through marriage targeting Hindu and Christian girls

- 29.** Girls from religious minorities face abduction, forced conversion and marriage. UN experts reported in April 2026 that about 75 per cent of those affected in 2025 were Hindu and 25 per cent Christian, that almost 80 per cent of incidents occurred in Sindh, and that adolescent girls between 14 and 18 are particularly targeted.⁴² Girls facing poverty and marginalisation are at heightened risk.⁴³
- 30.** Conversion is used to place a marriage beyond the reach of child marriage law, so that a girl's purported change of religion becomes legal protection for her abductor. This is discrimination on the ground of religion under Article 2(2), a denial of free consent under Article 10(1) and, for the girls concerned, the end of their schooling. UN experts have called on Pakistan to criminalise forced religious conversion as a distinct offence.⁴⁴

Recommendation XI

We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan criminalise forced religious conversion as a distinct offence, and require courts to verify age against official birth or identity records before accepting any declaration of conversion or marriage, so that a declaration alone cannot shield a perpetrator.

Impunity and weak enforcement of existing child marriage legislation

- 31.** Laws against child marriage are weakly enforced. UN experts attribute the persistence of forced conversion through marriage to impunity, and have called for all allegations to be investigated promptly, impartially and effectively.⁴⁵ Punjab's 2026 legislation makes child marriage a non-bailable offence punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment,⁴⁶ but penalties deter only where complaints are registered and prosecuted.
- 32.** Without published data on complaints, prosecutions and convictions, neither the public nor the Committee can assess whether these laws operate in practice. Legislation that is not enforced does not discharge the State party's obligation under Article 10(3) to protect children and young persons.

⁴² OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *UN experts concerned by forced conversion through marriage in Pakistan*, (April 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ MORNING STAR NEWS, « Legislation to Combat Child Marriages Signed in Punjab, Pakistan », (12 February 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

Recommendation XII
1. The Committee should ask Pakistan for the number of prosecutions, complaints and convictions under each child marriage law for every year since 2020.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan require marriage registrars to verify age against official records, penalise registrars who fail to do so, and train police to register complaints, so that reported cases result in prosecution.

Religious and political resistance to legal reform

- 33.** Reform remains contested. The Council of Islamic Ideology opposed the Islamabad Capital Territory law signed on 31 May 2025.⁴⁷ In June 2026, two petitions were filed before the Federal Shariat Court against the Islamabad and Punjab laws, asking whether fixing 18 rather than puberty as the minimum age is consistent with Islamic principles, a question the Court has already considered in detail.⁴⁸ An adverse ruling would not remain confined to those jurisdictions and could weaken protections that already exist elsewhere in the country.⁴⁹ Pakistan's obligations under the Covenant do not vary with domestic contestation. The State party should defend its own legislation and build public support for it.

Recommendation XIII
We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan what position the Government is taking in the proceedings before the Federal Shariat Court. Further, We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan defend the minimum age of 18 in those proceedings.

Shrinking Civic Space Restricting the Enjoyment of Covenant Rights

Arbitrary pre-emptive detention of political activists and their families

- 34.** Pakistan detains political activists and their relatives before any protest has taken place. On 20 September 2026, Aleema Khan, sister of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, was placed under 30-day administrative detention under the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1960, ahead of a march planned by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for 27 September.⁵⁰ Her sisters Uzma Khan and Noreen Niazi and her driver were made subject to 30-day detention orders,⁵¹ and three PTI members of parliament were taken into custody along with dozens of party workers.⁵²

⁴⁷ See *supra*, note 39.

⁴⁸ See *supra*, note 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Pakistan: Arbitrary detention of Imran Khan's family and party activists a flagrant violation of human rights*, (21 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁵¹ ANI, « "Targeting Imran Khan's family a flagrant violation of their rights": Amnesty International », *The Tribune*, (21 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁵² See *supra*, note 51.

- 35.** Amnesty International found that those detained were targeted for their familial ties, political affiliation and plans to protest.⁵³ Detention without charge on the basis of kinship punishes families for the opinions of their members, contrary to the protection that Article 10(1) accords to the family, and removes detainees from their work and their dependants. Civic participation cannot be exercised by people who are detained in anticipation of it.

Recommendation XIV
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan how many persons were detained under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance in 2026, and on what individual grounds.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan release all persons detained solely for their political affiliation or family ties, and amend the Ordinance so that preventive detention requires prior judicial authorisation based on individual evidence, so that no person is detained on account of kinship.

Movement restrictions disrupting livelihoods and access to services

- 36.** Blanket restrictions on movement impose the cost of political disputes on the general public. From 23 September 2026, authorities closed the Islamabad–Peshawar and Islamabad–Dera Ismail Khan motorways and the Grand Trunk Road at several points, and placed about 2,000 shipping containers around the capital and at Attock Bridge.⁵⁴ Police deployed 22,000 security personnel, and a schoolteacher told reporters that “ordinary people are facing serious difficulties”.⁵⁵
- 37.** Closures that are indiscriminate prevent workers from reaching their jobs, patients from reaching hospitals, students and teachers from reaching schools, and goods from reaching markets. They interfere with Articles 6, 11, 12 and 13 for an entire population, and are disproportionate wherever less restrictive means are available.

Recommendation XV
1. We urge the Committee to ask Pakistan for the legal basis of the September 2026 closures and for any assessment made of their effect on access to work, health care and education.
2. We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan adopt a public protocol under which any road closure is time-limited, published in advance and preserves corridors for ambulances, essential goods, students and workers, so that essential services continue during security operations.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ AL JAZEERA, « Pakistan seals roads to Islamabad before protests for Imran Khan’s release », (23 September 2026). [Accéder en ligne](#).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Internet shutdowns limiting access to information and education

- 38.** Internet shutdowns have become a recurring instrument of control. The August 2026 suspension of mobile and internet services in Quetta disconnected students from online classes and disrupted healthcare, businesses and digital payments.⁵⁶ Freedom Network cites a 16-day internet blackout in Balochistan in August 2025.⁵⁷
- 39.** Connectivity is now a precondition of education, work and access to health information. A shutdown therefore suspends the enjoyment of Articles 6, 12, 13 and 15(1)(b) simultaneously, and falls hardest on a province already at the bottom of every education indicator. Shutdowns not ordered in writing, published and limited in time cannot satisfy Article 4, under which limitations must be determined by law.

Recommendation XVI

We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan legislate that any suspension requires a written, published and time-limited order subject to judicial review, with exemptions for education and health services, so students and patients are not cut off.

Discrimination on the ground of political opinion

- 40.** The measures above are not applied neutrally. Article 2(2) prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of Covenant rights on the ground of ‘political or other opinion’. The detentions of September 2026 targeted the members and relatives of a single opposition party, and the Minister of Interior stated that the Government would stop its march “in every possible way”.⁵⁸ Entry to and exit from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province governed by that party, were barred.⁵⁹
- 41.** Where the residents of one province, or the supporters of one party, bear restrictions on their movement, livelihood and liberty that others do not, the enjoyment of Covenant rights has been made conditional on political opinion.

Recommendation XVII

We encourage the Committee to recommend that Pakistan guarantee in law and in practice that access to work, education, health care and freedom of movement is not restricted on the basis of political affiliation, and establish an independent review of the September 2026 measures, so that those responsible for discriminatory restrictions are held to account.

⁵⁶ See *supra*, note 11.

⁵⁷ See *supra*, note 31.

⁵⁸ See *supra*, note 51.

⁵⁹ See *supra*, note 56.

Recommendations Summarised

- 42.** The violations of the Covenant set out in this report share a single consequence: people in Pakistan are being denied the education, information and freedom they need in order to participate in public life and to claim their rights. Should these violations continue, Pakistan will see a further erosion of the foundations on which every Covenant right depends. In response to the issues outlined in this report, we urge the Committee to:
- A.** Call on Pakistan to withdraw the directive expelling Afghan medical and dental students and restore their enrolment, so that they are able to complete their degrees.
 - B.** Recommend a costed, time-bound plan to bring Balochistan's out-of-school rate down to the national average, and the investigation of all reported disappearances of students and academics.
 - C.** Require Pakistan to justify the reduction in education expenditure, and recommend a time-bound path to 4 per cent of GDP with annual published benchmarks.
 - D.** Recommend an annual, published national assessment of reading and numeracy at the end of primary school, so that learning poverty is measurably reduced.
 - E.** Recommend that human rights and civic education become a compulsory, assessed component of primary and secondary schooling.
 - F.** Ask how many threats against journalists have been investigated, and recommend a functional and resourced journalist safety commission.
 - G.** Recommend that the No Objection Certificate requirement for international media be withdrawn or made subject to a fixed time limit, written reasons and a right of appeal.
 - H.** Recommend that the false information offence under PECA be repealed or narrowly defined, without custodial penalties.
 - I.** Urge Pakistan to set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for both sexes, without exception, in every province and territory.
 - J.** Recommend a guaranteed right of return to school for married and pregnant girls, and conditional stipends for girls' secondary attendance.
 - K.** Recommend that forced religious conversion be criminalised as a distinct offence, and that courts verify age against official records.
 - L.** Request annual data on complaints, prosecutions and convictions under child marriage laws, and recommend mandatory age verification by marriage registrars.
 - M.** Ask what position Pakistan is taking before the Federal Shariat Court, and recommend that it defend the minimum age of 18.

- N.** Call for the release of all persons detained solely for their political affiliation or family ties, and for prior judicial authorisation of preventive detention.
 - O.** Recommend that road closures and internet shutdowns be ordered only in writing, published, limited in time and subject to judicial review, with exemptions for education, health and essential goods.
 - P.** Recommend an independent review of the September 2026 measures, and a guarantee that Covenant rights are not restricted on the ground of political opinion.
- 43.** Education, information and civic freedom constitute the fundamental pillars upon which the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in Pakistan depends. The recommendations above respond to the threats faced by these pillars, including declining and unequal investment in education, the intimidation of those who report on public affairs, the marriage of girls in place of their schooling, and the use of detention, road closures and internet shutdowns against political participation.
- 44.** We kindly appeal to the Committee to remember that civics education is the most valuable tool in securing a more prosperous tomorrow; we hope the Committee will recognise that and take this, along with other recommendations, to the table. We look forward to the interactive dialogue which will follow.
- 45.** This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact:

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