PAKISTAN PRISON DATA REPORT 2026

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AUTHORS

Haris Zaki

Team Lead Policy and Advocacy, Justice Project Pakistan

Ayesha Gardezi

Team Lead Data and Research, Justice Project Pakistan

EDITORS

Rabiya Javeri Agha

Chairperson, National Commission For Human Rights

Sarah Belal

Executive Director, Justice Project Pakistan

DATA COLLECTION

Fakhra Irshad

Investigation Specialist, Justice Project Pakistan

RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

Rimsha Asif

Policy and Advocacy Officer, Justice Project Pakistan

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Introduction

For many years, Pakistan's prison population remained relatively stable. Between 2009 and 2018, it generally ranged between 74,000 and 84,000 prisoners, increasing overall by only around 1%. Since 2019, that pattern has changed sharply. By 2026, Pakistan's prisons held **110,513 people** — an increase of 50.1% since 2019.

This growth reflects how the criminal justice system uses imprisonment: who is arrested, who receives bail, how long cases take to conclude, which offences are criminalised, and whether meaningful alternatives to imprisonment are available.

This second edition of the Prison Data Report brings together the most recent available prison data from across Pakistan to examine these trends and the factors driving them. It looks at national and provincial differences, identifies the people most affected by the growth in imprisonment, and considers where there is evidence that different approaches can produce different outcomes.

The report also looks beyond the numbers. It considers the laws, policies and criminal justice practices that shape who enters prison and how long they remain there, while identifying emerging reforms and opportunities to reduce unnecessary imprisonment and improve conditions of detention.

The aim is to use evidence to understand where Pakistan's prison system is heading, what is driving that trajectory, and what can be done to change it.

Methodology

This report is based primarily on official data obtained from the prison departments of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan through RTI's. The data covers prison population and capacity, trial status, offence, gender, age, death row and foreign national prisoners. Where available, it also includes information on prison infrastructure, healthcare, sanitation and other essential services.

Jurisdiction	Date of data	Main limitations
Punjab	28/06/2026	None identified
Sindh	01/09/2026	None identified
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	15/09/2026	None identified
Balochistan	16/09/2026	Data shared is not disaggregated by offence
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	27/01/2026	None identified
Gilgit-Baltistan	10/09/2026	Data shared is not disaggregated by offence

The report compares this data with figures published in NCHR & JPP's previous data report to analyse national and provincial trends over time. Occupancy rates were calculated by comparing the prison population with authorised capacity. An occupancy rate of 150%, for example, means that a prison holds 50% more people than it was designed to accommodate.

The analysis also draws on legislation, judgments, government reports and policy documents, parliamentary records, official statements, UN treaty-body findings, international human rights standards, published research and credible media reports. JPP's prison research and interviews with prisoners and former prisoners have been used where they provide further context to the official data.

Prison departments do not use a uniform system for collecting or reporting data. Reporting dates, definitions and levels of detail therefore differ across jurisdictions. Some departments did not provide information for every category. Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan did not provide crime-wise disaggregated data. The national figures should therefore be read as a consolidation of the most recent official data available from each jurisdiction, rather than a count taken across Pakistan on a single date. These limitations are identified throughout the report where they affect comparison or analysis.

Executive Summary

Pakistan's prison population is growing rapidly

Pakistan's prison population has entered a period of sustained growth. In 2026, the country's prisons held **110,513 people**, compared with 102,026 in 2024—an increase of 8.3% in two years. The longer-term change is even more striking. After remaining relatively stable for much of the previous decade, the prison population has increased by **50.1%** since 2019.

This growth is not simply a problem of too little prison space. It is a problem of too many people being sent to prison, and too many being kept there for too long.

Pakistan's prisons are holding 110,513 people in facilities designed for approximately 68,832. The system is operating at **160.6% of authorised capacity**. Sindh and Punjab are operating at 193% and 176.5% of capacity respectively. Yet Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan remain within their overall authorised capacity and have reduced their prison populations.

The difference between these provinces is important. It shows that prison growth is not inevitable. Prison populations are shaped by laws, arrest practices, bail decisions, case disposal, access to alternatives to imprisonment and the way criminal justice institutions operate.

The biggest pressure is the under-trial population

Pakistan's prisons hold **82,988 undertrial prisoners**, representing **75.09% of the national prison population**. The under-trial population alone is larger than the country's entire authorised prison capacity by 14,156 people. In other words, even if every convicted prisoner were released, Pakistan would still have more prisoners than its prisons were designed to hold.

These are people who have not been convicted. Yet many spend months or years in prison because bail is unaffordable, surety requirements cannot be met, investigations are delayed, hearings are repeatedly adjourned and cases move slowly through an overburdened justice system. The result is a system in which pre-trial detention, intended to be exceptional and temporary, has become a central driver of prison growth.

Punitive drug laws are driving prison growth

Drug-related incarceration has become another major driver of Pakistan's prison population. More than **28,000 people are imprisoned under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA)**—more than one-quarter of the entire prison population. The number of prisoners held under the CNSA has increased by **43.4% since 2023**, far faster than the overall prison population.

The 2022 amendments to the CNSA introduced harsher penalties, mandatory minimum sentences and restrictive bail provisions. They also restricted access to remission, probation and parole for most people accused under the law.

Furthermore, drug policy is not only a criminal justice issue. It is also a **public health, poverty and social protection issue**. A system that responds to drug use and low-level involvement through imprisonment will continue to fill prisons without addressing the conditions that drive drug-related offending.

The impact is not evenly distributed

The number of children in prison has fallen by 26.1% since 2024, but **1,170** children remain in custody and **86.4%** are held under trial. The country has only eight reported Juvenile Justice Committees and 13 juvenile courts. Children can also remain in detention after being granted bail because they cannot provide a financial surety or have nowhere safe to go.

Women's imprisonment is moving in the opposite direction. Pakistan held **2,020 women in prison in 2026**, compared with 1,534 in 2024—an increase of **31.7% in two years**. In Punjab, the number of women imprisoned under the CNSA more than doubled during this period.

These figures show why prison reform cannot be reduced to questions of capacity and infrastructure. Who is being imprisoned, why they are being imprisoned and whether they have realistic routes out of custody matter just as much as how many prison places exist.

The same is true of people on death row. Pakistan holds one of the largest known death rows in the world with **3,220 people in 2026**.[1] Yet 2,912 people—90.4% of those on death row—are still awaiting High Court confirmation of their sentences. Punjab alone holds 2,372 death-row prisoners, or 73.7% of the national total.

The decline in death row is significant, but the data also show the need for greater transparency and consistency in the capital justice system.

Pakistan already has evidence of what can work

The most important lesson from the provincial data is that prison populations can fall.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reduced its prison population from 13,364 in 2024 to 11,521 in 2026—a decline of **13.8%**—and is operating at 85.6% of authorised capacity. Balochistan also reduced its prison population by 7.3% and remains within its overall capacity.

These provinces have made greater use of probation, parole, dispute resolution, juvenile diversion and judicial case-review mechanisms. The report does not suggest that any single intervention explains their performance. But their experience provides an important counterpoint to the assumption that the only response to rising prison populations is to build more prisons.

There is therefore an opportunity to learn from what is already working in Pakistan, evaluate it properly and expand effective approaches across provinces.

1. Amnesty International, Death Sentences and Executions 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/05/executions-surge-highest-recorded-figure-44-years/

From evidence to implementation

Pakistan now also has a national framework for responding to the crisis.

The **National Action Plan for Prison Reform**, presented at the National Conference on Prison Reform in July 2026, calls for reducing unnecessary imprisonment, expanding access to bail and legal aid, strengthening probation and parole, improving prison conditions and developing time-bound provincial reform plans. The **National Action Plan for Human Rights 2026** reinforces this agenda by setting commitments around prison-rule reform, independent monitoring, inspections, annual reporting, staff training and accountability.

Together, these commitments provide a framework for moving from evidence to implementation.

The priorities are clear: reduce unnecessary arrest and pre-trial detention; make bail affordable and accessible; reform punitive drug laws; expand probation, parole and diversion; remove financial barriers to release; address laws and practices that criminalise poverty; improve the speed of criminal proceedings; and strengthen healthcare, oversight and conditions inside prisons.

The objective should not be to build enough prisons to accommodate a continually growing prison population. It should be to **r**educe unnecessary imprisonment while making prisons safer, more humane and more effective for those who genuinely need to be there.

Pakistan's prison crisis is serious, but it is not insurmountable. The data show where the pressure is coming from. The experience of provinces moving in a different direction shows that change is possible. And, for the first time, Pakistan has a growing national framework that can turn these lessons into action. The task now is implementation, and measuring whether reform actually reduces unnecessary imprisonment.

1. Key Trends in Pakistan's Prisons

Pakistan's prison population is growing at its fastest sustained rate in more than a decade. This growth is being driven largely by the accumulation of people awaiting trial and the sharp rise in drug-related incarceration.

But the national figures do not tell a uniform story. Punjab and Sindh account for most of the increase, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan remain within their overall authorised capacity. These differences show that rising prison populations are not inevitable. They reflect the laws, policies, and criminal justice practices operating within each province.

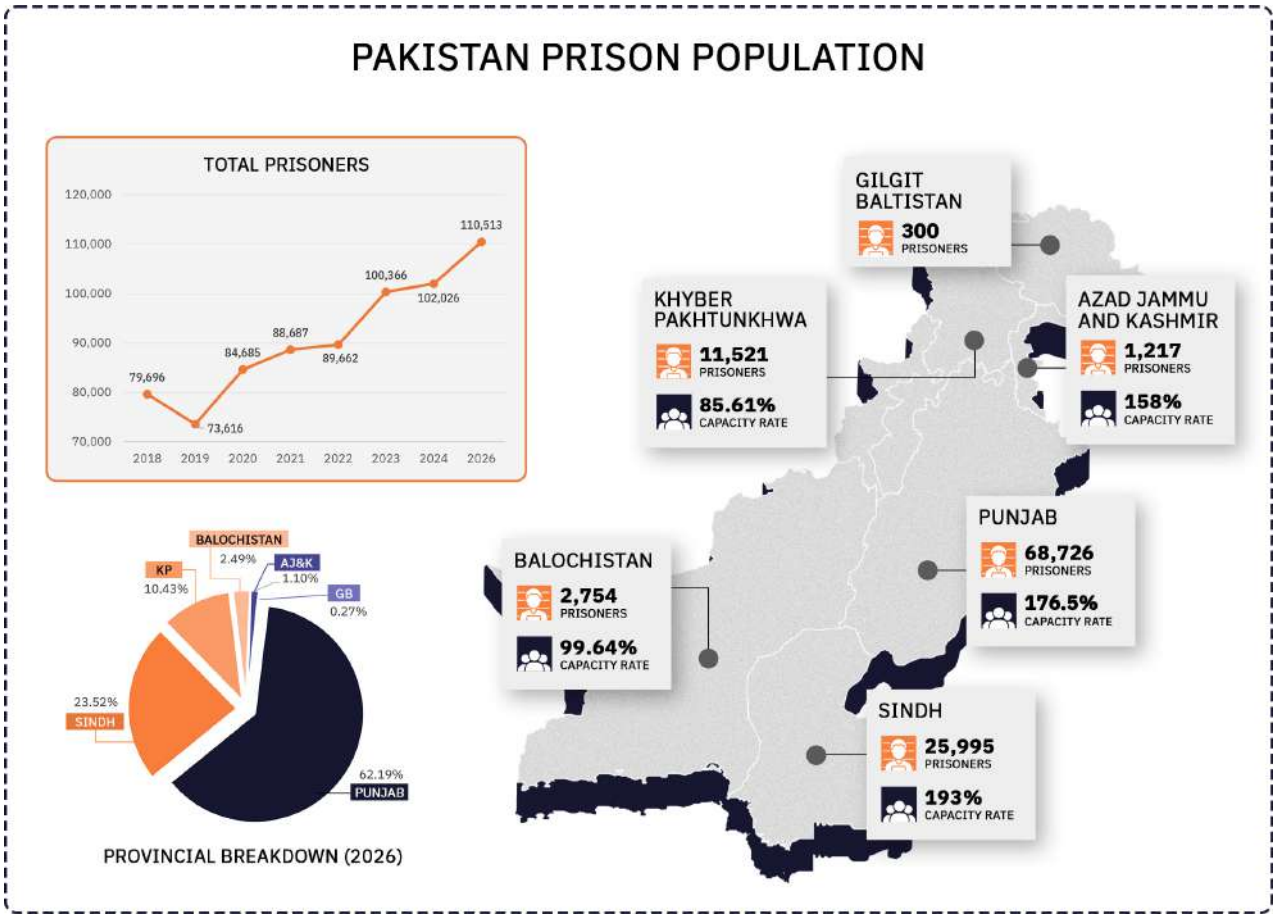


Figure 1. Pakistan prison population and provincial overview

1.1 Rapid Prison Growth After a Decade of Stability

In 2026, Pakistan's prisons held **110,513 people**, compared with 102,026 in 2024. This represents an increase of **8.3%** in two years.

The longer-term trend is more striking. Between 2009 and 2018, Pakistan's prison population remained relatively stable, generally ranging between 74,000 and 84,000 and increasing overall by only approximately 1%. Since 2019, that pattern has changed. The prison population has increased from 73,616 to 110,513—an increase of **50.1 % in seven years**.

This growth has not been evenly distributed. Punjab and Sindh have experienced substantial increases and now operate far beyond their authorised capacity. By contrast, the prison populations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have declined and both provinces remain within their overall capacity. National growth, therefore, reflects different provincial trajectories operating within the same broader criminal justice system.

The provincial differences show that prison growth is not simply the unavoidable result of a growing population or a rise in crime. Prison populations are also shaped by policy choices: what conduct is criminalised, who is most likely to be arrested and imprisoned, how bail and sentencing operate, how cases move through the courts, and whether alternatives to imprisonment are available and used. These choices often bear most heavily on people already facing poverty and social disadvantage.

Key observations:

- Pakistan's prison population increased by **8.3 % between 2024 and 2026** compared to only 1.7 % between 2023 and 2024.
- It has increased by **50.1 % since 2019**.
- Punjab holds **62.2 %** of the national prison population.
- Sindh now has the highest provincial occupancy (overcrowding) rate.
- KP and Balochistan demonstrate that continued prison growth is not inevitable.

Figure 2. Two eras of Pakistan's prison population

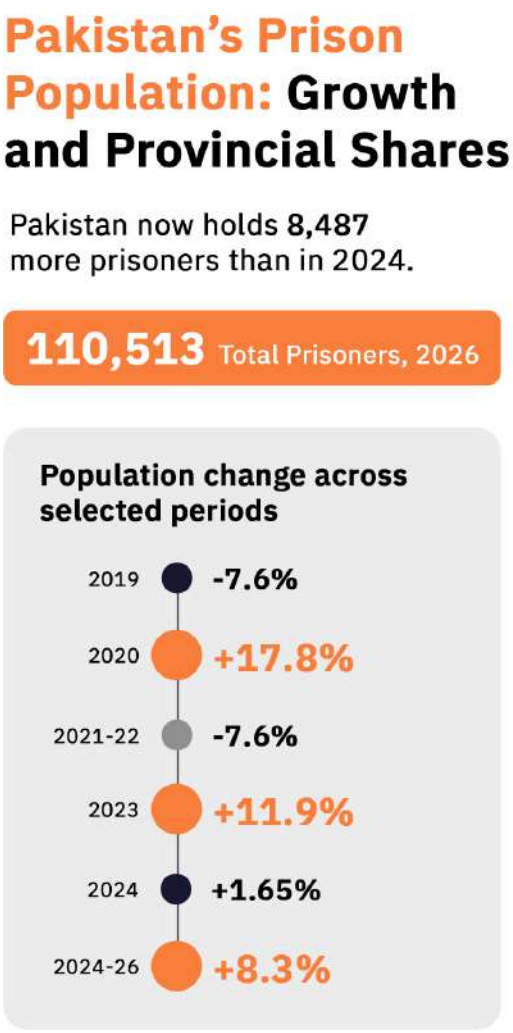


Figure 3. Pakistan prison population growth since 2018

2026 population share by province

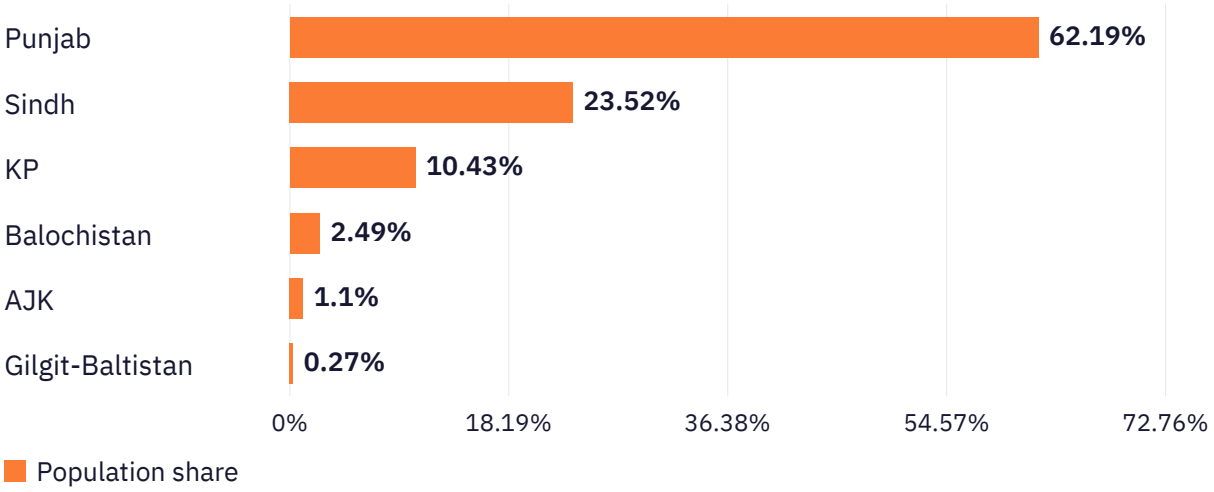


Figure 4. Prison population share by province in 2026

1.2 Overcrowding Is Driven by Overincarceration

Pakistan's prisons hold **110,513 people in facilities designed for approximately 68,832**. The system is operating at around **160.6% of its authorised capacity**, with 41,681 more prisoners than it was built to accommodate.

This pressure is not evenly distributed. Sindh and Punjab operate at **193%** and **176.5% of capacity**, respectively. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, by contrast, remain within their overall authorised capacity. Even within provinces, overcrowding is concentrated in particular prisons, with some facilities holding several times the number of people they were designed for.

The lower occupancy levels in KP and Balochistan should also be considered in light of their investment in community-based supervision. Since 2021, the EU-funded Deliver Justice programme, implemented by UNDP, UNODC and UN Women[2] has strengthened criminal justice institutions across Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through legislative reforms, digital transformation, citizen-centric policing, prison modernisation, and enhanced access to justice.[3] This has included strengthening coordination between probation services, courts, prisons, police and prosecutors, and training probation and parole officers to supervise, rehabilitate and reintegrate people in the community. These initiatives have helped strengthen the institutions needed to make alternatives to imprisonment work and may have contributed to the different prison population trajectories in these provinces.

Overcrowding is often treated as an infrastructure problem. However, nearly three-quarters of Pakistan's prisoners are

2. United Nations Development Programme, "EU-Funded 'Deliver Justice Project' Celebrates Five Years of Impact in Pakistan," press release, May 21, 2026, https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/eu-funded-deliver-justice-project-celebrates-five-years-impact-pakistan.

3. The EU-funded Deliver Justice Project is a €20 million, five-year rule-of-law programme jointly implemented by UNDP, UNODC and UN Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including the Merged Districts) and Balochistan.

undergoing trial, and the under-trial population alone exceeds the total capacity of the country's prison system by more than 14,000 people. The central problem is therefore not simply that Pakistan has too few prison spaces. It is that too many people are sent to prison before conviction and remain there for too long.[4]

The frequent use of arrest and detention for petty and non-violent offences, restrictive bail practices, procedural delays and case backlogs, punitive narcotics laws, and the incarceration of people for poverty and status-based offences have contributed to an under-trial population that constitutes nearly three-quarters of all prisoners. Financial barriers can also make release dependent on a person's ability to afford bail or provide surety. Probation, parole, diversion and other alternatives to imprisonment remain limited or underused. The result is a criminal justice system in which people enter custody and remain there faster than the prison population can be sustainably reduced.

Building new prisons may provide temporary relief in individual facilities, but it cannot keep pace with continued prison growth.

The cost of building around the problem
The under-construction Islamabad Jail complex is expected to cost more than Rs7.4 billion and accommodate 2,000 prisoners.[5] Pakistan currently holds 41,681 prisoners above its authorised capacity; an addition of 2000 spaces will barely cause a dent. Efforts to increase capacity of existing jails and to construct new jails in Punjab[6] have shown a similar insufficiency in absorbing the excess population.

As recognised in the United Nations System Common Position on Incarceration,,[7] states facing overcrowding should first explore and exhaust opportunities to reduce the prison population before expanding prison capacity. This must be accompanied by investment in the institutions and services required to make non-custodial measures effective.

4. Pre-Trial Detainees are defined as "All persons who, in connection with an alleged offence, are detained in prison between the time of arrest and the time of judgment at first instance.""

5. Abdul Rasheed Azad, CDA says construction cost of Islamabad Jail escalates to Rs7.4bn, reflecting 89.7pc increase, Business Recorder (18 Dec. 2024), brecorder.com/news/40338184

6. Punjab Prisons, Construction of New Jails (n.d.), prisons.punjab.gov.pk/construction_of_new_jails

7. UN Common Position on Incarceration, 2018, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/UN_Common_Position_2026.pdf

Addressing overcrowding therefore requires a holistic, system-wide response aimed at reducing unnecessary incarceration and the excessive length of pretrial detention. Courts must ensure access to affordable bail and legal aid, and address procedural delays and case backlogs. Federal and provincial governments must strengthen probation, parole, diversion and other alternatives to imprisonment while implementing policies to reduce the under-trial population. Federal and provincial legislatures must also amend laws that drive overincarceration, including the federal and provincial Control of Narcotic Substances Acts.

These reforms require coordinated action by the judiciary, executive, and legislature. Individual measures taken in isolation will not address the laws and practices driving prison growth.

Key observations

• Pakistan's prisons hold **110,513 people** against an authorised capacity of approximately **68,832**.

• The national prison system is operating at **160.6 % of capacity**.

• Pakistan holds **41,681 prisoners above its authorised capacity**.

• The under-trial population alone exceeds the country's total prison capacity by **14,156 people**.

• KP and Balochistan show how stronger community-based supervision and alternatives to imprisonment may help reduce pressure on prisons.

Figure 5. Pakistan prison capacity, overcrowding and trial status

Occupancy by province

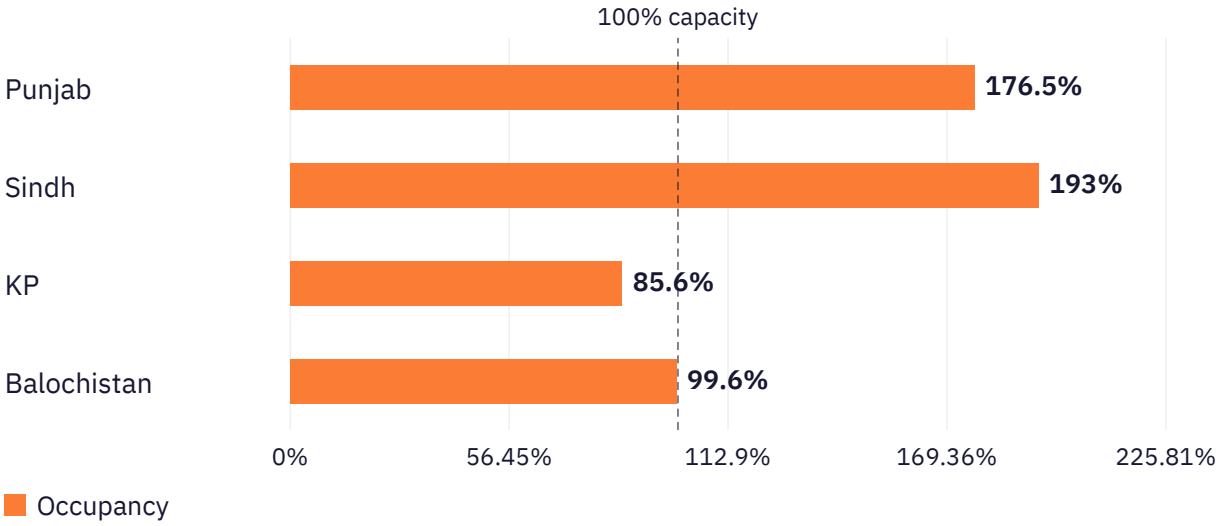


Figure 6. Prison occupancy by province

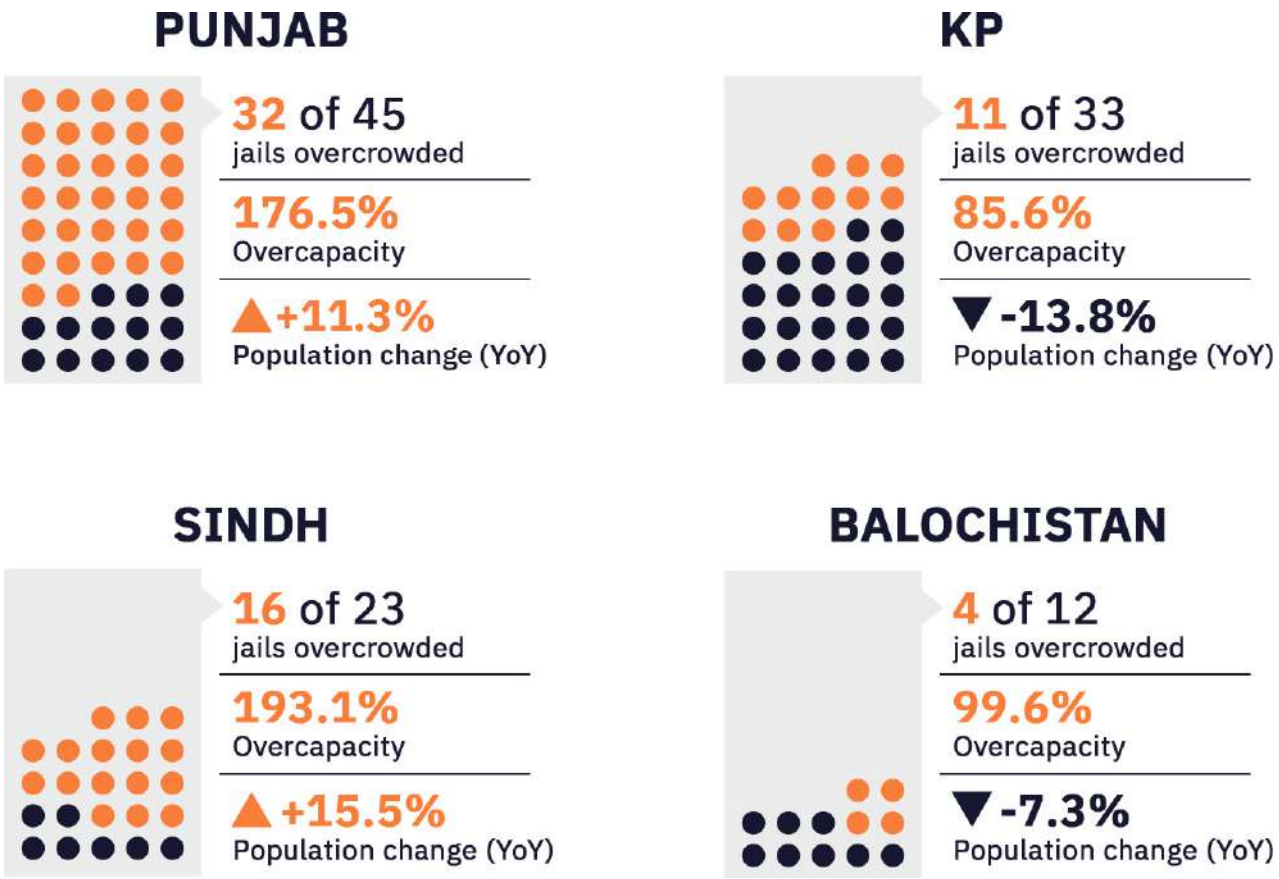


Figure 7. Overcrowding and population change by province

1.3 Pakistan Has More Under-Trial Prisoners Than Total Prison Capacity

Pakistan's prisons hold **82,988 under-trial prisoners—75.09 % of the total prison population**. These are people who have not been convicted of a crime.

The number of under-trial prisoners alone exceeds Pakistan's total authorised prison capacity of 68,832 by **14,156 people**. Even if every convicted prisoner was removed from prison, the system would still be overcrowded. Reducing under-trial detention is therefore central to any credible strategy for addressing prison overcrowding.

These alarming figures are the latest in a sustained trend. The proportion of under-trial prisoners increased from **64.47 % in 2022 to 75.09 % in 2026**. High under-trial populations are found in provinces operating both above and below their authorised capacity. This shows that excessive pretrial detention is a system-wide criminal justice problem, not simply a consequence of limited prison infrastructure.

The human consequences of prolonged pretrial detention are evident in NCHR's research with women imprisoned under drug laws at Adiala Jail. Every woman interviewed was awaiting trial; the median period already spent in custody was two years, while 65% had been detained for two years or longer. Access to legal representation was equally weak: 60% reported never having met a lawyer.

International human rights law requires pretrial detention to be the exception, rather than the general rule.[8] Decisions to detain must be based on an individual assessment of whether detention is necessary and proportionate, not applied automatically because of the offence a person is accused of committing.

In practice, however, bail remains inaccessible to many people. Courts may impose financial or property-based sureties that make release dependent on a person's means. As a result, some people remain imprisoned even after bail has been granted because they cannot meet its conditions.

Delayed investigations, repeated adjournments, difficulties in producing witnesses and accused persons before court, and large case backlogs further extend the time people spend awaiting trial. These delays can turn pretrial detention—intended to be temporary and exceptional—into months or years of imprisonment without conviction.

The legal framework also drives under-trial detention. The 2022 amendments to the Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997 introduced harsher penalties, mandatory minimum sentences, and restrictive bail provisions across wide drug-quantity thresholds. They also limited access to remission, parole and probation, except for women and children. Together, these provisions make it more likely that people accused of drug offences—including low-level and non-violent offences—will enter prison and remain there while their cases proceed.

Every unnecessary arrest, unaffordable bail condition, and delayed hearing adds to the pressure on prisons. It also exposes people, who have not been convicted, to overcrowding, poor sanitation, limited healthcare and prolonged separation from their families.

8. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 9(5), December 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force March 23, 1976).

Reducing the under-trial population requires action throughout the criminal justice process. Police and prosecutors must avoid unnecessary arrest and detention. Courts should grant affordable bail, regularly review continued detention and ensure timely trials. Governments must strengthen legal aid, case management, witness production and coordination between prisons and courts.

Legislatures must reform laws that restrict release or drive unnecessary incarceration, while making diversion, probation and other non-custodial measures genuinely available.

When **three out of every four prisoners are awaiting trial**, prison overcrowding cannot be solved within the prison system alone.

Key observations

- Pakistan holds **82,988 under-trial prisoners**.
- Under-trial prisoners constitute **75.09 %** of the prison population.
- Under-trial prisoners alone exceed the country's total authorised prison capacity by **14,156**.
- The under-trial share increased from **71.5 % in 2022 to 75.09 % in 2026**.
- Excessive under-trial detention is the largest single driver of pressure on Pakistan's prisons.

Number of under-trial prisoners

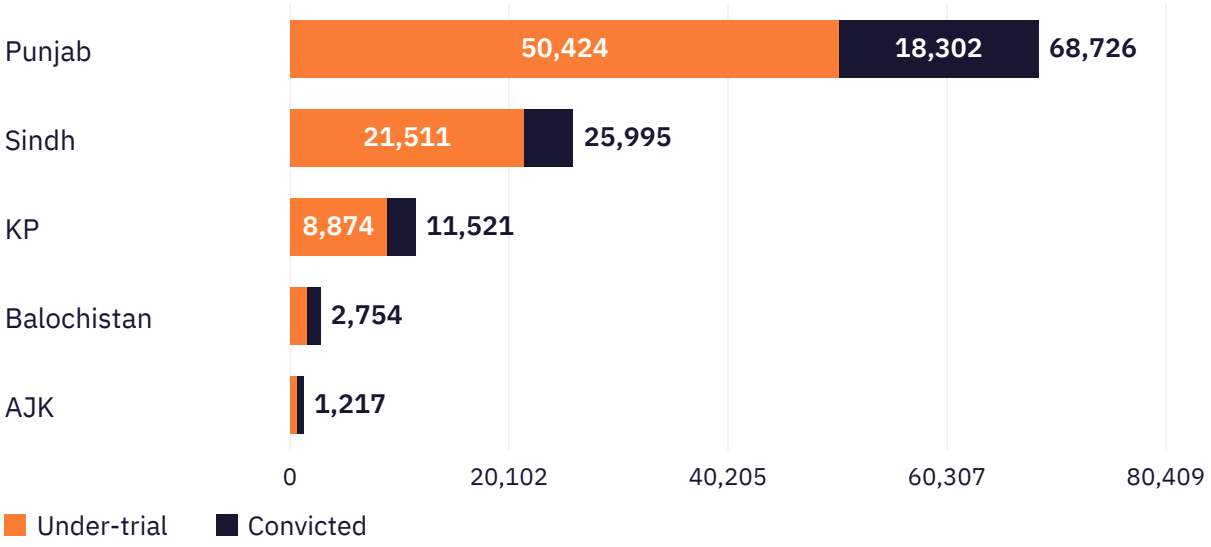


Figure 8. Under-trial prisoners by province

1.4 Drug-Related Incarcerations is Driving Prison Growth

Pakistan's punitive response to drug offences is driving both an overcrowding crisis and a wider public-health emergency. **More than 28,000 people are now imprisoned under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA)**—over one-quarter of Pakistan's entire prison population.

This assessment is increasingly reflected in national oversight and reform processes. Following more than 300 prison inspections and research across prisons and other places of detention, the NCHR has identified drug laws as a major driver of prison overcrowding, reinforcing the need to address the legal and policy choices that determine who enters prison and how long they remain there.

The number of CNSA prisoners has increased exponentially by **43.4 % since 2023**, far outpacing growth in the overall prison population. **Drug-related incarceration has therefore become one of the largest drivers of prison growth in Pakistan.**

This rise reflects Pakistan's highly punitive approach to drug policy, which continues to rely heavily on arrest and imprisonment as the default response to drug use, possession and low-level involvement in the drug trade. The law is purely possession-based, and does not distinguish between people who use drugs, low-level offenders and those involved in serious trafficking.

Through more than 300 prison inspections, visits to over 50 police stations and Anti-Narcotics Force facilities, and primary research with women imprisoned under drug laws, NCHR has seen the human impact of this punitive approach firsthand. NCHR's interviews with women incarcerated under drug laws at Adiala Jail reveal the socioeconomic vulnerability underlying women's involvement in drug offences. All women interviewed were identified as carriers rather than drug users; 80% were mothers, 80% were illiterate and 35% were widowed or divorced. Sixty-five per cent had been engaged in low-income work, while the remaining 35% reported having no income.

The 2022 amendments to the CNSA introduced mandatory minimum sentences across wide drug-quantity thresholds. They also restricted bail and removed access to probation, parole and remission for most people convicted under the Act. Although Pakistan abolished the death penalty for drug offences in 2023, these provisions continue to send people to prison and keep them there for longer.

The impact was immediate. At Justice Project Pakistan's *Reimagining Justice* conference in April 2024,[9] the Inspector General of Punjab Prisons reported an exponential increase of approximately 12,000 people in the provincial prison population within eight months of the amendments coming into force. While this increase cannot be attributed to the amendments alone, its timing—and the subsequent national rise in CNSA prisoners—shows the scale of the pressure created by punitive drug laws.

Drug Incarceration Is Also a Public-Health Issue

The consequences extend beyond overcrowding. Many people who use drugs require healthcare, harm-reduction services or voluntary treatment—not imprisonment. Placing them in overcrowded prisons can worsen drug dependence and expose them to infectious diseases without addressing the reasons behind their drug use.

Overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate healthcare increase the risk of HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis. In 2025, **645 prisoners were reported to be living with HIV across Punjab's 43 prisons**. This included 148 people in Adiala Jail, where 4,337 prisoners were held in a facility designed for 1,994. Interruptions in antiretroviral medication were also reported, increasing the risks to prisoners' health and treatment.

Pakistan's own law recognises that drug dependence requires treatment. Sections 52 and 53 of the CNSA place responsibility on federal and provincial governments to establish treatment and rehabilitation services. The Control of Narcotic Substances Rules, 2001 also require arrangements for treatment, including inside prisons.

Yet treatment services have not kept pace with the scale of need. Official reporting shows that existing Model Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres treated only **2,024 people during the first nine months of 2025–26**. This is a fraction of the number imprisoned under the CNSA.

International standards require drug-dependence treatment to be voluntary, evidence-based and accessible, including for people in prison. United Nations guidance also supports a shift away from compulsory detention and towards voluntary, community-based treatment and care.

Pakistan's current approach reverses that priority. The State has expanded arrest and imprisonment without building a comparable system of treatment, harm reduction and community-based care. Prisons are being used in place of effective healthcare services, despite being poorly equipped to provide it.

With more than 28,000 people already imprisoned under the CNSA, continuing this approach will deepen overcrowding, overwhelm prison healthcare and allow preventable illness to circulate between prisons and communities.

Overcrowded prisons increase the risk of tuberculosis and create conditions in which respiratory infections, including COVID-19, can spread rapidly. Poor ventilation, inadequate healthcare and delays in diagnosis and treatment make these risks worse. Continuing to arrest and imprison people for minor and non-violent drug offences therefore exposes prisoners, prison staff and the wider community to preventable illness and death.

Reform requires a clear distinction between drug use, low-level offending and serious trafficking. Imprisonment should be reserved for serious offences. Bail, probation, parole and remission should be restored for low-level and non-violent cases, while people with drug

9. Justice Project Pakistan, Reimagining Justice: Public Health and Human Rights-Centered Drug Policy, Post-Event Report, April 2024, https://jpp.org.pk/reimagining-justice-public-health-human-rights-centered-drug-policy/

dependence should be diverted towards voluntary, evidence-based treatment. Federal and provincial governments must also fulfil their existing responsibility under Section 53 to establish accessible treatment services and provide equivalent, uninterrupted healthcare inside prisons.

Without a shift from punishment to health, Pakistan's drug policy will continue to increase incarceration while leaving the underlying public-health crisis untreated.

Turning International Standards into Judicial Practice

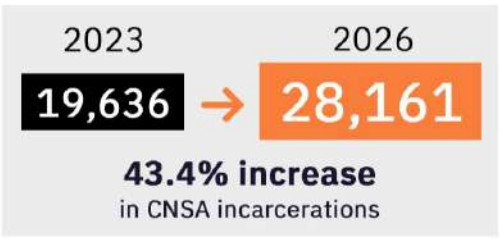
A promising intervention is the Federal Judicial Academy's e-course on the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy, developed with Justice Project Pakistan and the International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy at the University of Essex. Launched in January 2025 alongside an expert workshop involving judges from across Pakistan, the course provides practical guidance on fair trials, arbitrary detention, proportionate sentencing and alternatives to imprisonment. The University of Essex reports that a judge who received training subsequently relied on the International Guidelines in a case that resulted in the release of a vulnerable mother from pretrial detention.[10]

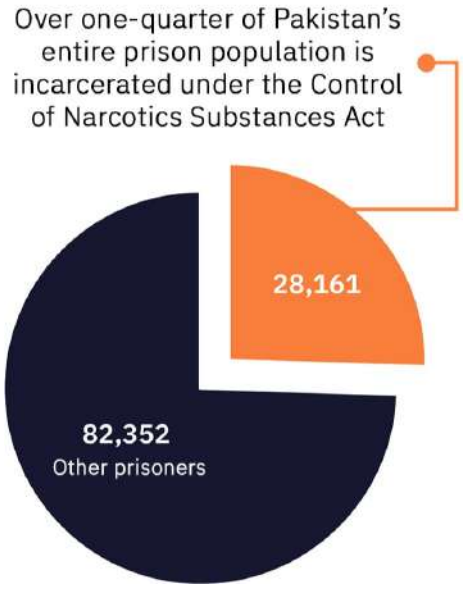
Importantly, it trains judges to consider mitigating evidence—including poverty, coercion, caregiving responsibilities and a person's actual role in a drug offence—rather than relying only on the type or quantity of the substance involved. The course cannot replace legislative reform, but it can help judges use the discretion available to prevent unnecessary detention and disproportionate punishment. It should be institutionalised across federal and provincial judicial academies, with its impact measured through bail, sentencing and non-custodial outcomes.

Key observations

- More than **28,000 people** are imprisoned under the CNSA.
- CNSA prisoners constitute over **one-quarter of Pakistan's prison population**.
- The CNSA prison population has increased by **43.4 % since 2023**.
- Drug-related incarceration is growing much faster than the overall prison population.
- Punitive drug laws are increasing overcrowding while treatment and harm-reduction services remain severely limited.

10. Essex human rights expert supports historic drug reform in Pakistan, March 2025, https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2025/03/04/essex-supports-historic-drug-reform-in-pakistan





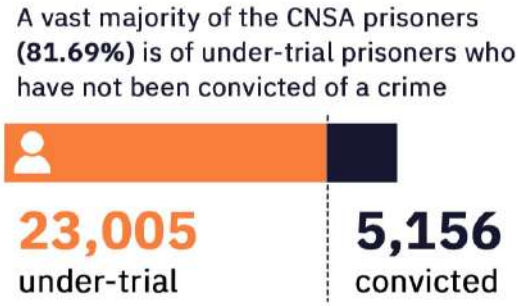


Figure 9. Imprisonment under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act

1.5 Women's Imprisonment Has Risen Sharply

Pakistan held **2,020 women in prison in 2026**, compared with 1,534 in 2024—an increase of **31.7% in two years**. Women still constitute only **1.83 %** of all prisoners, but this sharp rise—following increases of just 3.3 % and 2.8 % in the two preceding reporting periods—marks a fundamental change in the trajectory of women's imprisonment.

This increase is being driven in significant part by drug-related incarceration. In Punjab, **570 of 1,442 women prisoners** are held under the CNSA. The number has more than doubled since 2024, when 271 women were held for narcotics offences. In Sindh, **100 of 401 women prisoners** are held in narcotics cases, including 69 who are still under-trial. In Balochistan, 25 of the province's 37 women prisoners are held under the CNSA.

These figures raise serious questions about whether existing bail protections are working. The federal CNSA preserves greater access to bail for women. Yet women continue to enter prison in growing numbers for drug offences and often remain there while their cases are pending. In Punjab, 79 % of all women prisoners are under trial. In Balochistan, the proportion is 94.6 %.

The right to bail on paper offers little protection if a woman lacks legal representation, cannot afford a financial surety or remains detained while her application is delayed. Courts must therefore examine not only whether bail is legally available, but whether women can obtain it in practice.

Women's involvement in drug offences must also be understood in context. Women are frequently used in low-level and highly visible roles, including carrying, storing or delivering drugs. Their involvement may be shaped by poverty, debt, coercion, deception, domestic abuse or pressure from a partner or family member. They may have little control over the drugs and no access to those who organise or profit from the trade.

Speaking at the panel on *Women and Drug Policy* on the sidelines of the 63rd Human Rights Council session in Geneva, NCHR Chairperson highlighted the Commission's research in Adiala Jail, where 90% of the women interviewed were single parents, widowed, abandoned or divorced—reinforcing a wider pattern of poverty and vulnerability. For many of these women, the journey to jail did not begin with drugs; it began much earlier, with poverty, abandonment and desperate vulnerability**.**

At the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2026, the Director General of the Legal Aid and Justice Authority also reported that almost all of approximately 120 women detained for drug offences during a visit to Adiala Jail were indigent and victims of coercion. Many had acted because of severe economic hardship.

The criminal justice system rarely distinguishes between these women and those who organise or profit from drug trafficking. Mandatory sentences and restrictions on bail and early release therefore fall heavily on women who may have played minor roles and present little risk to public safety.

Research by UNODC and Pakistan's Ministry of Human Rights has documented depression, anxiety, trauma and other serious mental-health concerns among imprisoned women.[11] Inadequate healthcare and shortages of women medical staff make these conditions harder to address. Women held far from their homes may receive few family visits, while stigma and family rejection can make it difficult to find housing or employment after release.

The Bangkok Rules require courts to consider women's backgrounds, caregiving responsibilities and histories of victimisation.[12] They also encourage non-custodial measures for women accused or convicted of non-violent offences. These protections remain underused in Pakistan.

The Legal Aid and Justice Authority's digital legal-aid initiative at Adiala Jail offers a promising model.[13] It seeks to identify under-trial women held in CNSA cases, assign legal counsel and monitor their detention. Its results should be measured against the number of women who receive representation, secure bail without unaffordable sureties and are released from unnecessary detention. Successful approaches should be expanded across the country.

Reducing women's imprisonment requires early access to legal aid, affordable bail and

11. UNODC Country Office Pakistan, Females Behind Bars: Situation and Needs Assessment in Female Prisons and Barracks, 2011

12. UN General Assembly, United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) : note / by the Secretariat, A/C.3/65/L.5, 6 October 2010, https://www.refworld.org/reference/themreport/unga/2010/79245

13. Justice Project Pakistan, Women, Poverty, and the Failure of the CNSA: Structural Vulnerabilities and the Human Cost of Gender-Neutral Drug Laws, policy brief, August 2026, https://www.jpp.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Drug-Policy-CNSA.pdf

greater use of non-custodial measures. Courts should consider coercion, poverty, abuse, pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities at every stage of a case. Women who must remain in custody should receive appropriate physical and mental healthcare, be held close to their families and receive support for their release and reintegration.

Key observations

- The number of women prisoners increased by **31.7%** between 2024 and 2026.
- In Punjab, the number of women imprisoned under the CNSA increased by **110.3%**.
- Existing bail protections have not prevented the growing imprisonment of women for drug offences.
- Poverty, coercion, abuse and low-level involvement are often overlooked during sentencing.
- Imprisoning women can separate families, deepen poverty and cause lasting harm to their children.

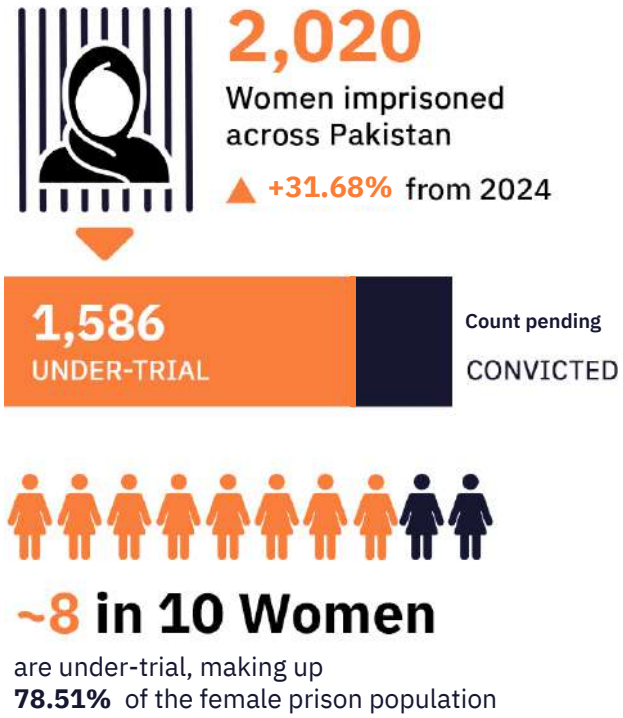


Figure 10. Women prisoners and trial status in Pakistan

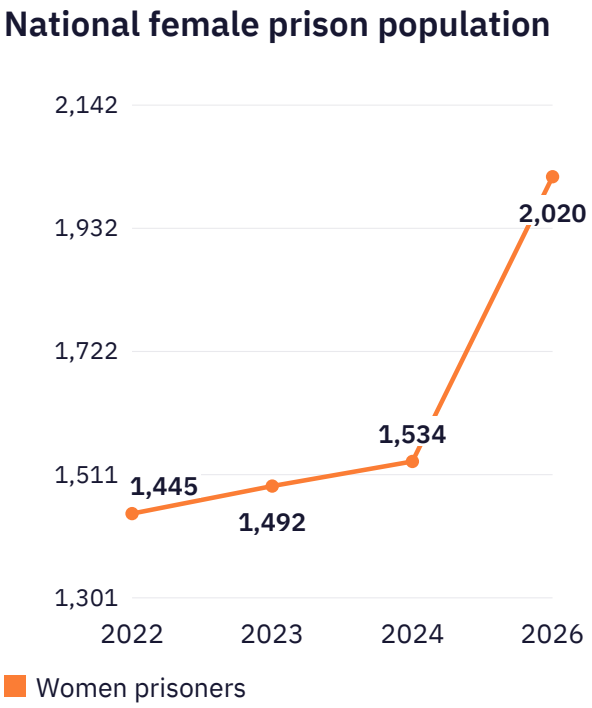


Figure 11. National female prison population over time

1.6 Fewer Children Are in Prison, but Almost Nine in Ten Are Awaiting Trial

While Pakistan is imprisoning fewer children, those who enter the criminal justice system continue to be denied adequate safeguards and protections at every stage.

The number of children in prison fell from **1,584 in 2024 to 1,170 in 2026**—a reduction of **26.1%**. This is an important reversal after several years of growth, but the decline conceals a continuing crisis. **86.41% of children in prison are under-trial.**

This procedural failure has alarming consequences. Detention removes children from their families, schools and communities at a critical stage of their development. It exposes them to the lasting harm of imprisonment even when they may later be acquitted, diverted or given a non-custodial sentence. Domestic law and international standards consistently require the detention of a child to be used only as a measure of last resort, and for the shortest appropriate period. Pakistan's under-trial figures show that detention remains a routine response.

The Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) of 2018 already provides many of the protections needed to keep children out of prison. It prioritises bail, diversion, probation and community-based rehabilitation. It also provides for specialised juvenile courts and Juvenile Justice Committees to identify cases suitable for diversion.

Unfortunately, the JJSA's implementation remains extremely limited. The National Commission on the Rights of the Child found only **eight Juvenile Justice Committees across approximately 160 districts** and only **13 juvenile courts nationwide**.[14] In their absence, children continue to be processed through ordinary courts without the specialised protections guaranteed to them by law.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has described violations of children's rights in Pakistan's criminal justice system as systematic. It found that children are routinely held beyond legal time limits, denied timely legal assistance, detained in unsafe and overcrowded conditions, and prevented from leaving pretrial detention because they cannot provide financial sureties.[15] It called for urgent implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Act and an end to bail conditions that disadvantage children from poor families.

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR')s investigation at Adiala Jail shows what this failure means in practice. Of 82 children held in the prison, 79 were awaiting trial and 29 had no legal representation. 75% of the boys had no father and came from some of the poorest sections of society.[16] Some had already been granted bail but remained imprisoned because they could not provide sureties, had no state support and had nowhere to go.

Importance of Effective Legal Assistance and Independent Monitoring

There is, however, growing evidence of the impact that effective legal assistance and independent detention monitoring can have in reducing the incarceration of children. NCHR

14. National Commission on the Rights of Child, The State of Children in Pakistan 2025 (Islamabad: National Commission on the Rights of Child, 2026), https://ncrc.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/State-of-Children-2025.cdr_.pdf.

15. Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Pakistan, UN Doc CRC/C/PAK/CO/6–7 (5 February 2026), paras 47(c), (f)–(h) and 48(a), (i)–(k), tbinternet.ohchr.org

16. National Commission for Human Rights, "NCHR Inquiry Report on Custodial Torture at Central Jail (Adiala), Rawalpindi," press release, October 25, 2022, https://nchr.gov.pk/press_release/press-release-nchr-inquiry-report-on-custodial-torture-at-central-jail-adiala-rawalpindi/

reports that more than 300 children have been released through its pro bono legal assistance, alongside more than 100 visits to juvenile detention centres and 90 surveys conducted in juvenile detention settings.

Release Without Protection

The failure does not end when a child leaves prison. Children released on bail, acquitted, discharged or released after completing a sentence may return to the same poverty, homelessness, family breakdown or exploitation that brought them into contact with the justice system. Many leave without a safe place to live, a social worker, help returning to school, psychological support or any plan for their reintegration. The result is recidivism and a cycle of incarceration. This is starkly illustrated by NCHR's experience: of 75 indigent children whose release it secured, 12 were back in prison within just one month because effective rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms were absent. The experience underscores that reducing juvenile incarceration requires more than securing a child's release; it requires ensuring that children have the support necessary to remain out of prison.

Provincial child-protection and juvenile justice systems operate under separate laws and institutions. Children accused or convicted of an offence can consequently fall between them. Punjab's principal child-protection law, for example, expressly limits its scope to destitute and neglected children **"other than those involved in criminal litigation."**[17] This exclusion creates a serious protection gap for children who may be among the most vulnerable and in greatest need of state support.

A child does not stop being entitled to protection because they have been accused or convicted of an offence. Yet children leaving detention can effectively be returned to the streets without shelter, education, family support or supervision. Release without protection is not reintegration. It merely returns a vulnerable child to the conditions that placed them at risk.

The law and policy framework must protect children throughout their contact with the justice system—from arrest to release and reintegration. Provincial child-protection laws and institutional mandates should expressly include children accused or convicted of offences. Child-protection authorities, probation departments, prisons and Juvenile Justice Committees must share responsibility for preparing and implementing an individual reintegration plan before every child is released.

These plans should include family tracing and assessment, safe accommodation where required, re-entry into education or vocational training, healthcare and psychosocial support, and continued supervision by a trained social worker or probation officer. No child should remain in prison because they lack a surety or a safe place to go. No child should be released from prison directly into homelessness or neglect.

A Promising Investment in Child Justice

In December 2024, UNICEF Pakistan and the Federal Judicial Academy launched the **Reimagine Justice for Children in Pakistan** initiative.[18] The programme aims to build a

17. Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004, Punjab Act No. XVIII of 2004, preamble, June 22, 2004, http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/472.html

18. UNICEF Pakistan, "UNICEF's 'Reimagine Justice for Children Initiative' Launched at Federal Judicial Academy," press release, December 9, 2024, https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/press-releases/unicefs-reimagine-justice-children-initiative-launched-federal-judicial-academy

more child-centred justice system by strengthening legal knowledge, judicial capacity and the use of diversion for children in conflict with the law.

The initiative established a Justice for Children Interactive Resource Centre at the Federal Judicial Academy and has supported training on the Juvenile Justice System Act. Subsequent activities have included practical training for Juvenile Justice Committee members on diversion, referral procedures and implementation.

Under the J4C initiative, a series of jail monitoring visits were undertaken to assess the rights and protection of children in conflict with the law in detention. These visits were led by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), with support from Group Development Pakistan (GDP), JPP, and UNICEF. Conducted in accordance with NCHR's statutory mandate to monitor places of detention, the visits aimed to assess compliance with the JJSA and identify systemic gaps affecting the rights and protection of children in detention.

These are important institutional gains. They strengthen the capacity needed to apply protections that already exist in law and demonstrate growing recognition that children should be diverted away from courts and detention wherever possible.

As implementation continues, the results of this initiative will be important in showing how targeted investment in diversion, legal assistance and institutional capacity can reduce the unnecessary detention of children. Future reporting should track the number of functional Juvenile Justice Committees, children provided with legal assistance, cases diverted, children released without financial sureties, and children receiving reintegration support. These findings can help identify effective approaches for wider adoption across Pakistan and encourage further investment in child-centred prison reform.

Pakistan does not primarily lack legal protections for children. It lacks the institutions, resources and coordination needed to make those protections real. Juvenile Justice Committees and specialised courts must be established and made functional across the country. Children must receive legal assistance from the first point of contact. Bail must not depend on a family's ability to pay, and diversion must become the normal response to minor and non-violent offending.

A smaller juvenile prison population is welcome. But as long as almost nine in ten imprisoned children are awaiting trial—and children leaving prison can fall outside the protection system—Pakistan's juvenile justice framework will continue to punish the children it is legally required to protect.

Key observations

• The number of imprisoned children fell by **26.1 % between 2024 and 2026**.

• Pakistan's prisons still hold **1,170 children**.

• **86.2 %** of imprisoned children are awaiting trial.

• Only **eight Juvenile Justice Committees** and **13 juvenile courts** were reported nationwide.

• Children can remain imprisoned after receiving bail because they cannot provide a surety or have nowhere safe to go.

• Provincial child-protection systems do not consistently protect children accused or convicted of offences.

• Every child leaving detention requires a properly funded reintegration and aftercare plan.

Figure 12. Change in Pakistan's juvenile prison population

Figure 13. Juvenile prisoners and child justice institutions in Pakistan

1.7 Death Row is Declining, But Remains Significant

Pakistan's death-row population has fallen substantially over the long term, but the decline has not been linear. There were 7,164 people under sentence of death in 2012. The population fell to 2,976 in 2020, before rising again to 3,604 in 2023 and 3,646 in 2024. By July 2025 it had fallen to 3,394, and the latest prison data records **3,220** prisoners under sentence of death in 2026.

One of the most significant reductions followed a major intervention by the Supreme Court. In 2014, a special bench headed by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa was constituted to clear the backlog of criminal appeals before the Court. The bench dealt with thousands of pending cases, including appeals dating back to the 1990s. In the capital cases it reviewed, JPP's *Counting the Condemned* found that **467 of 546 death sentences (85%) were overturned or commuted**, largely because of serious problems with investigations, evidence and witness testimony.[19]

The effect on the death-row population was substantial. The number of prisoners under sentence of death fell from **7,164 in 2012 to 2,976 in 2020**. This decline was driven in significant part by the special Supreme Court bench and its rigorous application of evidentiary standards in capital cases.

This experience is important because it shows that the size of death row is not determined only by the number of death sentences imposed by trial courts. What happens after a sentence is imposed matters just as much. Strong appellate review can identify wrongful convictions, unsafe evidence and cases where the death penalty should not have been imposed, and can therefore reduce the number of people remaining on death row.

The reduction, however, was not sustained. Justice Khosa retired in December 2019, and the Supreme Court did not maintain the same dedicated mechanism for clearing criminal appeals as a continuous institutional arrangement. Subsequent benches were constituted at different points to address criminal backlogs, but the specialist approach was not maintained in the same form. The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted trials and criminal proceedings, contributing to the unusually low number of new capital cases reaching the system in 2020. As courts and prosecutions resumed, the death-row population rose to **3,831 in 2021**, before falling again to **3,226 in 2022** and then increasing to **3,604 in 2023** and **3,646 in 2024**. The death-row population began rising again after Justice Khosa's retirement in 2019.

The trajectory therefore tells an important story. Reductions in death row are not self-sustaining. They depend on what happens throughout the capital justice system: the number of new death sentences imposed by trial courts; the quality of investigations and trials; the rigour and speed of appellate review; High Court confirmation; commutations and mercy; and changes in the law.

19. Justice Project Pakistan, Counting the Condemned (4 October 2018), jpp.org.pk; National Commission for Human Rights and Justice Project Pakistan, The Death Penalty in Pakistan 2025 (10 October 2025) 17–19, jpp.org.pk

The recent decline is significant

The latest decline is particularly striking because it runs against the wider prison trend. Between 2024 and 2026, Pakistan's overall prison population increased by **8.3%**, from 102,026 to 110,513, while the death-row population fell by **11.7%**. Death-row prisoners now account for around **2.9% of all prisoners**, compared with approximately 3.6% in 2024.

Pakistan has also carried out **no execution since December 2019**. The current death-row population is therefore shaped not by executions, but by the balance between new death sentences entering the system and prisoners leaving death row through appellate review, acquittal, commutation, changes in law and other judicial or executive outcomes.

The recent decline also reflects important changes in the law. Parliament removed capital punishment for railway sabotage in 2022 and for federal narcotics offences in 2023. The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2025 subsequently removed the death penalty for offences under sections 354-A and 402-C of the Pakistan Penal Code. Pakistan nevertheless continues to prescribe capital punishment for 29 offences.

Death row remains heavily concentrated

Punjab holds **2,372 of Pakistan's 3,220 death-row prisoners**, or 73.7% of the national total. This is disproportionate even to its overall share of the prison population: Punjab holds 62.2% of all prisoners nationally but almost three-quarters of the death row. Sindh holds 446, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 247, Balochistan 65, Azad Jammu and Kashmir 53 and Gilgit-Baltistan 37.

The data also reveal a significant military-law component in KP, where **139 prisoners are recorded under section 59 of the Pakistan Army Act**. This makes military-law cases an important part of the province's death-row profile and highlights the need for greater transparency in national death-penalty data.

The smaller jurisdictions present a different picture. Gilgit-Baltistan has only 37 people under sentence of death, but they represent approximately 12.3% of its entire prison population. This reflects the composition of its death row: in 2025, more than half of those under sentence of death were held under the Anti-Terrorism Act.[20] The high proportion is therefore less a sign of widespread capital sentencing than of a small prison system carrying a concentrated number of serious capital cases.

Nine in ten death sentences remain unconfirmed

The strongest finding in the 2026 data concerns the legal status of people recorded on death row. Of the **3,220 people under sentence of death, 2,912, or 90.4%, are unconfirmed condemned prisoners**. Only 308 are recorded as confirmed condemned prisoners.[21]

Punjab illustrates the scale of the issue. Of its 2,372 death-row prisoners, **2,104 are unconfirmed** and only 268 are confirmed. Almost 89% of Punjab's death row is therefore awaiting High Court confirmation, and Punjab alone accounts for more than 72% of all unconfirmed condemned prisoners nationally.

This is particularly significant in light of recent progress at the Supreme Court. In October

20. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2025 (HRCP 2026) 125, hrcp-web.org

21. In this report, 'unconfirmed' refers to individuals who have been sentenced to death by a trial court but whose appeals are still pending before the High Court. 'Confirmed' refers to those whose death sentences have been upheld on appeal by the High Court.

2024, 384 death-sentence cases were pending before the Court. By January 2026, that number had fallen to 107 after 449 cases were disposed of and 172 new cases entered the docket. By September 2026, the Chief Justice reported that the Supreme Court had disposed of **613 death-sentence appeals**, leaving only 31 cases instituted in 2026 pending.[4]

The Supreme Court has therefore substantially reduced its historical capital-case backlog. But this has not eliminated the much larger population awaiting determination earlier in the judicial process. **The principal pressure point is now concentrated at the trial court-to-High Court stage.** Clearing the final appellate backlog cannot by itself substantially reduce a death row in which nine out of ten sentences remain unconfirmed.

People remain on death row for offences no longer punishable by death

Pakistan continues to hold **seven prisoners under narcotics-related death-row categories**, four in Punjab and three in Sindh, despite Parliament removing the death penalty from the federal Control of Narcotic Substances Act in 2023.

These cases illustrate a wider problem: legislative reform does not automatically identify every prisoner affected by it. When capital punishment is removed from an offence, prison departments, courts and governments need a systematic process for identifying existing sentences and reviewing them accordingly.

Executive clemency: a route out of death row

The executive has also demonstrated that there can be routes out of death row beyond the courts. For many years, however, this route was largely theoretical. Although Article 45 of the Constitution provides for presidential pardon, reprieve, respite and commutation, no death-row prisoner had received clemency after the moratorium on executions was lifted in 2014. Pakistan's own submissions to the UN Human Rights Committee stated that prisoners had the right to seek presidential pardon, but did not provide information showing that such petitions had been granted. The Committee subsequently called for comprehensive rules governing mercy petitions, with greater transparency, certainty, due process and objectivity.

That changed in 2025. **On 2 October 2025, after sustained engagement by the NCHR with the Government of Pakistan, Abdul Basit became the first death-row prisoner to receive presidential clemency since 2006.** Basit, who had become paralysed from the waist down after contracting tuberculosis meningitis in prison and had faced four execution warrants, was granted mercy under Article 45 and released from Faisalabad Central Prison. The NCHR's sustained engagement in the case of Abdul Basit contributed to the commutation of his death sentence in October 2025. The case demonstrates the important role that an independent national human rights institution can play in bringing the circumstances and vulnerabilities of individual prisoners before the State and ensuring that mechanisms of mercy remain meaningful safeguards within the criminal justice system.

The size of Pakistan's death row is shaped by judicial, legislative and executive decisions. Courts can overturn unsafe convictions and reduce appellate backlogs; Parliament can remove the death penalty from offences; and the executive can provide a route to commutation or pardon where continued imprisonment or execution is no longer justified. The decline in death row therefore cannot be understood simply as a consequence of fewer executions. It reflects the cumulative effect of decisions made at different stages of the criminal justice system.

A smaller death row still requires reform

Pakistan's death row is smaller than it was a decade ago, and the recent decline is an important development. But **3,220 people remain under sentence of death, and nine in ten have not had their sentences confirmed by a High Court**.

The next measure of progress should therefore be more granular than the headline death-row total. High Courts should publish data on pending death-sentence references and appeals. Prison departments should routinely reconcile their records with legislative and appellate decisions. National data should distinguish between confirmed and unconfirmed sentences and record how prisoners leave death row through acquittal, commutation, resentencing or mercy.

A falling death-row population shows the direction of change. **Better data, timely review and effective safeguards will show whether Pakistan's capital justice system is becoming more consistent, transparent and reliable.**

Key observations

• Pakistan holds **3,220 people under sentence of death**, compared with 3,646 in 2024 and 7,164 in 2012.

• The death-row population fell by **11.7% between 2024 and 2026**, while the overall prison population increased by 8.3%.

• The creation of a special Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa in 2014 coincided with a major reduction in death row; in the capital cases it reviewed, **467 of 546 death sentences were overturned or commuted**.

• Punjab holds **2,372 death-row prisoners—73.7%** of the national total.

• **2,912 prisoners, or 90.4%, are awaiting High Court confirmation** of trial-court death sentences.

• Murder is the dominant recorded offence in Punjab, Sindh and KP, although offence categories overlap.

• KP records **139 death-row prisoners under section 59 of the Pakistan Army Act**, an unusually large military-law component in its death-row profile.

• **Fifteen women and one prisoner recorded as a juvenile** appear in the 2026 death-row data.

• **Seven prisoners remain recorded under narcotics-related death-row categories**, despite the removal of the federal death penalty for narcotics offences in 2023.

Death-row population over time

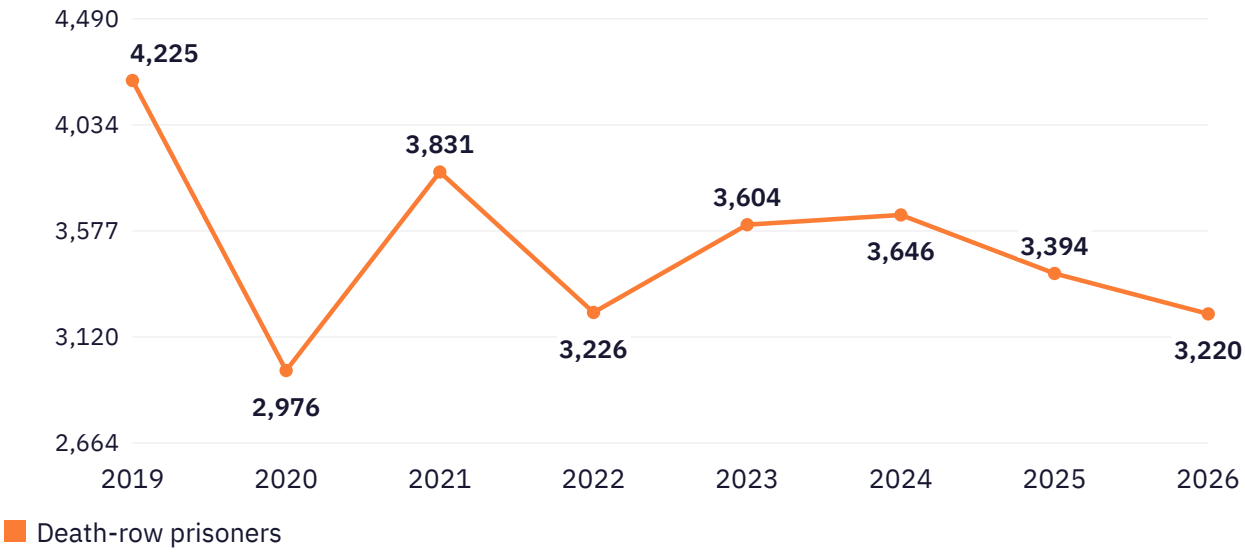


Figure 14. Pakistan's death row population over time

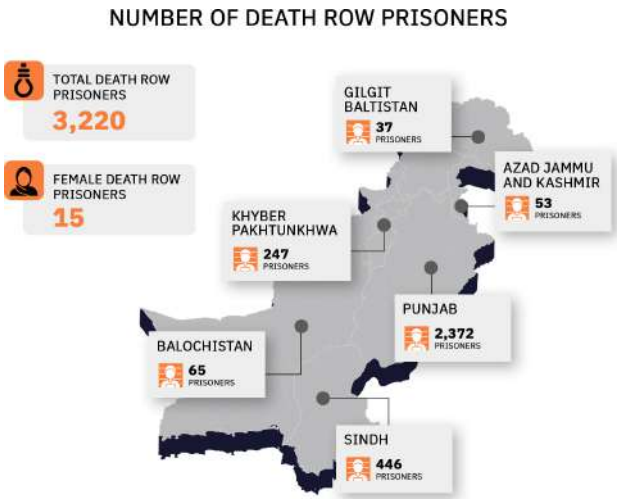


Figure 15. Death row prisoners by province

Top crimes on death row - Punjab

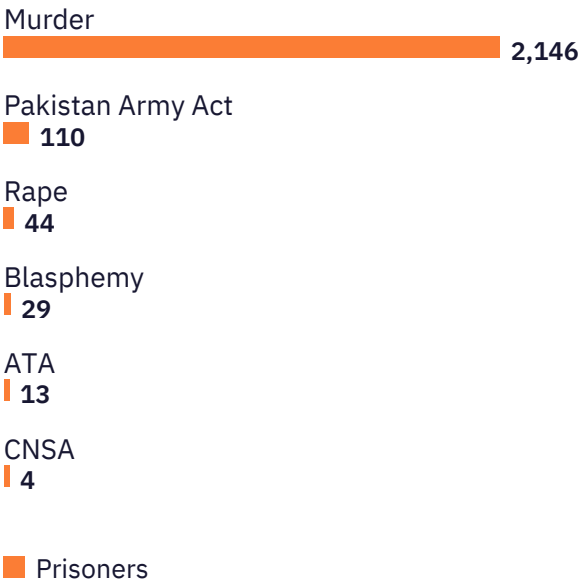


Figure 16. Offences of death row prisoners in Punjab

Top crimes on death row - Sindh

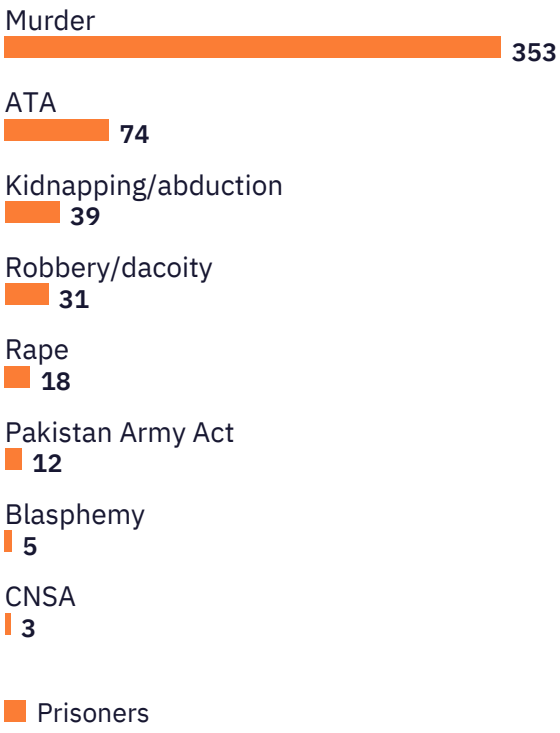


Figure 17. Offences of death row prisoners in Sindh

Top crimes on death row - KP

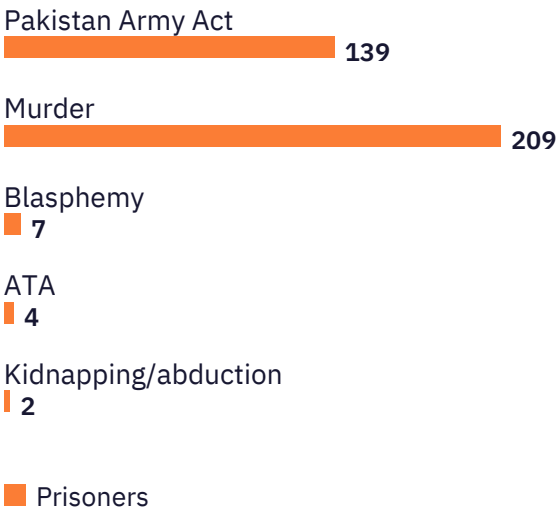


Figure 18. Offences of death row prisoners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Top crimes on death row - Balochistan

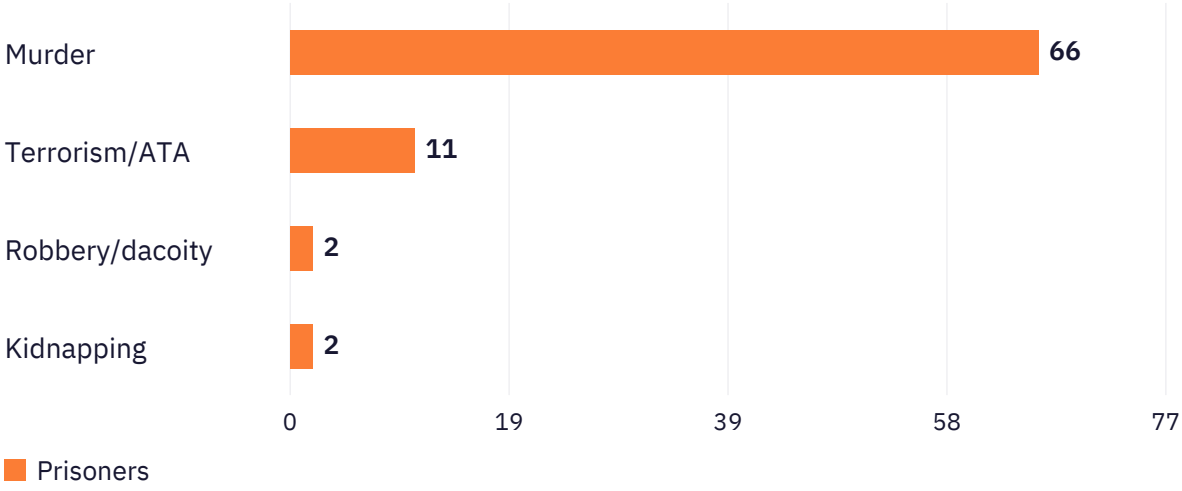


Figure 19. Offences of death row prisoners in Balochistan

1.8 From National Commitment to Measurable Reform

Pakistan now has a national framework for addressing the prison crisis documented in this report. On 2 July 2026, the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee convened the National Conference on Prison Reform, bringing together the judiciary, federal and provincial governments, prison authorities and national human rights institutions.[22] The Supreme Court and the National Commission for Human Rights developed and presented the National Action Plan for Prison Reform, a concrete set of judicial, executive and legislative measures aiming at tackling prison overcrowding by reducing the number of undertrial prisoners, and at improving conditions of detention across the country.

The conference resulted in the Islamabad Declaration on Prison Reform. It commits federal and provincial authorities to reducing unnecessary imprisonment, expanding access to bail and legal aid, strengthening probation and parole, and improving conditions inside prisons. It also calls for time-bound provincial reform plans and regular reporting on progress.[23]

These commitments recognise a central fact: prisons cannot solve a crisis created across the criminal justice system. Prison departments do not decide what conduct is criminalised, who is arrested, whether bail is granted, how quickly cases are decided or whether alternatives to imprisonment are available. Reform therefore requires coordinated action by the judiciary, legislatures, and federal and provincial governments.

The National Prison Reform Action Plan provides a practical route forward. It proposes reforming the CNSA to restore proportionate sentencing and alternatives to imprisonment, reviewing laws that criminalise poverty, removing financial barriers to bail and expanding probation and parole. It also proposes mobile court sessions inside prisons to resolve cases and identify people eligible for release, alongside reforms to healthcare, mental-health treatment, rehabilitation and independent complaint mechanisms.

The National Action Plan for Human Rights 2026 reinforces this agenda through specific administrative commitments and timelines.[24] It requires federal and provincial prison rules to be aligned with the Mandela, Bangkok, and Beijing Rules within one to two years.[25] It also calls for provincial and district prison monitoring committees, a framework for independent inspections within six months, annual provincial prison reports, staff training, and greater accountability for human rights violations.

The two plans are therefore complementary. The Prison Reform Action Plan identifies many of the laws and criminal justice practices that must change. The National Action Plan for Human Rights provides timelines, responsible institutions and indicators for improving prison administration and oversight. Implementation should bring these two strands together.

22. Supreme Court of Pakistan, National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee Steers National Consensus on Prison Reform, Press Release No. 97/2026 (2 July 2026), ljcp.gov.pk

23. Shahbaz Shah, Chief Ministers Pledge Nationwide Prison Reform in Islamabad Declaration, Law Today (2 July 2026), lawtoday.com.pk

24. Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Human Rights Launches National Action Plan on Human Rights 2026 (22 July 2026), mohr.gov.pk

25. Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan, Action Plan for Human Rights 2026 (2026), mohr.gov.pk

A Shared Reform Agenda

Reform priority	Existing national commitment	Institutions responsible	Measure of progress
Reduce under-trial detention	Expand bail and legal aid, introduce mobile prison courts and regular case reviews	Judiciary, prosecution services, legal-aid authorities, and provincial governments	Fewer under-trial prisoners and shorter periods of pretrial detention
Reform narcotics laws	Restore proportionate sentencing, bail, and alternatives to imprisonment under the CNSA	Parliament and provincial assemblies	Fewer people imprisoned for minor and low-level drug offences
Decriminalise poverty	Review laws and practices that imprison people because of poverty or status	Parliament, provincial assemblies, and law commissions	Laws amended or repealed and fewer people detained for poverty-related offences
Expand probation and parole	Strengthen non-custodial measures and community-based supervision	Provincial governments, courts, and probation and parole departments	Increased use of probation, parole, and other non-custodial measures
Remove financial barriers to release	Reform surety requirements and make bail practically accessible	Judiciary, legislatures, and legal-aid authorities	Fewer people remaining in prison solely because they cannot afford release
Modernise prison rules	Align federal and provincial rules with the Mandela, Bangkok and Beijing Rules within one to two years	Federal and provincial governments	Revised rules notified and implemented in every jurisdiction
Strengthen independent oversight	Establish monitoring committees and regular independent inspections within six months	NCHR, judiciary, and federal and provincial governments	Committees notified, inspections conducted, and findings published
Improve prison healthcare	Provide adequately-staffed physical and mental-health services	Provincial health and prison departments	Filled medical posts, uninterrupted medicines, and published health data
Improve transparency	Publish annual provincial prison reports and strengthen digital recordkeeping	Provincial prison departments, Ministry of Human Rights.	Complete, disaggregated prison data published annually

Funding Reform That Works

Implementation will require dedicated and sustained funding. Initiatives supported by the European Union and UNDP have shown the value of investing in legal aid, probation, parole, case management, and institutional capacity. Work to strengthen probation and reclamation departments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan is particularly relevant because both provinces have reduced their prison populations and remain within their authorised capacity.

Successful initiatives should not remain isolated pilots. They should be independently evaluated, adapted and expanded to other provinces. International funding should support long-term institutional reform rather than short-term activities alone, with clear indicators showing how many people received legal assistance, secured release, entered probation or parole, or avoided unnecessary imprisonment.

Civil-society organisations with established experience in prison reform should be included in the design, delivery and monitoring of these programmes. They can provide legal assistance, conduct independent research, monitor detention, support people after release, and connect government institutions with prisoners and their families.

The Legislature Must Address the Laws Driving Imprisonment

Administrative reform cannot compensate for laws that continue to send unnecessary numbers of people to prison. Parliament and the provincial assemblies must review the CNSA and other laws that criminalise poverty, status or minor non-violent conduct. They must also address mandatory sentences, restrictions on bail and release, unaffordable sureties and the limited availability of probation, parole and diversion.

This requires a systematic legislative review rather than isolated amendments. The federal and provincial law commissions, parliamentary committees, and law departments should identify which offences result in imprisonment despite posing little threat to public safety, who is most affected and what non-custodial response would be more proportionate.

Pakistan's law schools can make an important contribution to this work. Universities should undertake legislative audits, prison-data research and studies of bail, sentencing and case outcomes. Clinical legal-education programmes can also assist prisoners, document barriers to release and generate evidence on how laws operate in practice. Partnerships between law schools, government institutions and prison-reform organisations would expand the evidence available to legislatures while developing a new generation of criminal justice researchers and practitioners.

The test of Pakistan's national commitment will not be the number of conferences held, plans adopted or prisons constructed. It will be whether these commitments receive the funding, legislative action and institutional support required to reduce unnecessary imprisonment—and whether the next reporting cycle records fewer people in prison and safer, more humane conditions for those who remain.

2. Sindh

Sindh at a glance

Sindh is now Pakistan's most overcrowded provincial prison system. Its prisons hold 25,995 people in space authorised for 13,465, placing the province at 193.1% occupancy.

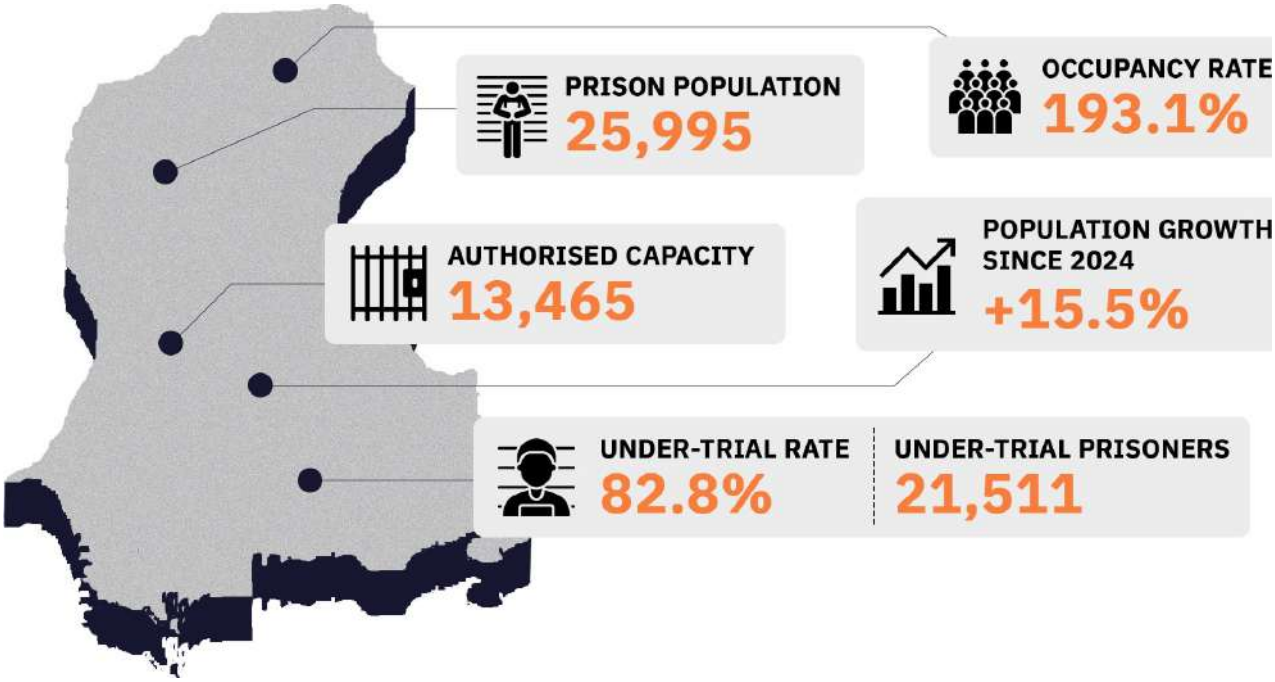


Figure 20. Sindh prison population overview

The clearest measure of the crisis is not the number of convicted prisoners, but the accumulation of people undergoing trial. Sindh holds **21,511 under-trial prisoners, the highest provincial proportion in Pakistan at 82.8 %**. The under-trial population alone exceeds the authorised capacity of the entire prison system by 8,046 people.

The situation has deteriorated rapidly. Sindh's prison population increased from 22,499 in 2024 to 25,995 in 2026, an increase of **15.5 %**, compared with national growth of 8.3 % over the same period. This follows an uneven longer-term trajectory: the population rose from 22,822 in 2022 to 24,904 in 2023, before falling in 2024 and then rising sharply again.

Sindh's overcrowding crisis is therefore not simply a shortage of prison space; it is the result of a criminal justice system that sends people into custody faster than it resolves their cases or releases those who do not need to remain in custody. Addressing it requires urgent action on arrest, bail, legal aid, financial sureties, investigation and trial delays, alongside greater use of probation, parole, diversion and other alternatives to imprisonment.

Figure 21. Rise in Sindh's under-trial rate since 2023

Figure 22. Sindh prison population over time

2.1 Under-trial Detention Is Overwhelming Sindh's Prisons

Sindh holds **21,511 under-trial prisoners**, representing **82.8%** of its prison population, the highest proportion in Pakistan. The under-trial population alone exceeds the authorised capacity of the province's entire prison system by **8,046 people**.

The rate is even higher among children. Of the 276 children imprisoned in Sindh, 265, or **96%, are awaiting trial**. Among women, 325 of 401 prisoners, or **81%**, remain under trial. These figures show that detention before conviction is not used as an exceptional measure.

Sindh's recent prison growth is also concentrated among people awaiting trial. For every convicted prisoner, there are approximately 5.7 prisoners awaiting trial. This means that the province's overcrowding crisis cannot be resolved only by increasing prison capacity. It depends on decisions made by the police, prosecutors and courts about arrest, remand, bail, financial sureties, and the speed at which cases are investigated and decided.

Expanded law-enforcement activity may be adding to this pressure. During the first six months of 2026, Sindh Police conducted **7,027 anti-narcotics raids, registered 7,468 cases, and arrested 9,096 people**. The Counter Terrorism Department conducted a further 777 intelligence-based operations and detained 355 suspects.[26]

These figures do not show how many arrests resulted in imprisonment. They do, however, show the volume of new cases entering an already overburdened criminal justice system. When enforcement expands without a corresponding increase in access to bail, legal assistance, and functioning courts, more people accumulate in custody while their cases remain unresolved.

Sindh must therefore treat reduction of the under-trial population as its central prison-reform priority. This requires early legal assistance, affordable bail, regular judicial review of detention, and faster investigation and adjudication. Mobile court sessions and case-review mechanisms should begin with prisons holding the largest under-trial populations and with people accused of minor and non-violent offences.

Figure 23. Remand and under-trial detention in Sindh

2.2 The Province Where Overcrowding Is Most Severe

For the first time since comparable provincial prison data became available, Sindh has overtaken Punjab as Pakistan's most overcrowded prison system. Its prisons hold 25,995 people against an authorised capacity of 13,465—working at **93.1%** above capacity. This crisis is driven by excessive under-trial detention as 82.8% of prisoners serve time before conviction. These numbers give rise to extreme and dangerous levels of overcrowding and place an untenable strain

26. News Desk, "Murad Orders Tougher Action against Organised Crime, Drug Trafficking," Pakistan Today, July 21, 2026, https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/07/21/murad-orders-tougher-action-against-organised-crime-drug-trafficking

on the justice system and the prison management infrastructure. In 2026, Sindh's Karachi Jail became one of the most severely overcrowded facilities in the country as it reached a 300% overcrowding rate. Similarly, Malir Jail has a capacity of 2,200 but is accommodating around 5,500 prisoners, and Hyderabad Central Jail with a capacity of 1,500 inmates currently houses around 3,000 prisoners.

Figure 24. Sindh prison capacity, overcrowding and trial status

Central Prison Karachi is the most overcrowded prison in Sindh. Its under-trial population alone exceeds the facility's entire authorised capacity. District Prison Malir holds more than two and a half times the number of people it was designed to accommodate.

Karachi and Malir together hold **12,587 prisoners, almost half of Sindh's entire prison population, in facilities designed for only 4,600**. This concentration makes conditions in these two prisons central to the provincial crisis.

Figure 25. Sindh's most overcrowded prisons

At this level of overcrowding, healthcare services, sanitation, kitchens, family-visitation areas, and prison staff must serve populations several times larger than the facilities were designed to support. Any failure in security, healthcare or essential services can affect thousands of people at once.

To reduce pressure in these prisons requires more than transferring people from overcrowded facilities; courts should conduct regular custody reviews, prioritise cases involving prolonged detention, and identify people who can be released on bail, probation, parole or other non-custodial measures.

When Overcrowding Becomes a Security Crisis: The Malir Escape

In June 2025, earthquake tremors led prison authorities to move prisoners at District Prison Malir into an open area as a safety measure. The resulting disorder allowed more than 200 prisoners to escape. One prisoner was killed and three security personnel were injured during the incident.[27]

Reports indicated that only 28 prison officers were on duty in a facility holding between 5,000 and 6,000 people. Government officials later stated that the people who escaped were primarily accused of minor offences and did not include anyone held in a militancy case.[28]

The incident exposed two connected failures. Extreme overcrowding had made the prison difficult to manage safely, while scarce prison space was being used to detain people whom the Government itself considered to present little risk to public safety.

The answer is not only tighter security. Reducing unnecessary detention would make prisons safer, ease pressure on staff and allow resources to be concentrated on people who genuinely require secure custody.

Sindh's Response: Expansion Without a Reduction Target

The Sindh Government has recognised that overcrowding must be addressed through the criminal justice process, not through prison construction alone. At the National Conference on Prison Reform, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah identified better investigations, speedier trials, and greater use of bail as necessary responses to the province's under-trial population. He also highlighted legal aid, community corrections, and remission.[29]

Sindh has also endorsed the Islamabad Declaration, committing the province to expand bail, probation, parole, diversion and other alternatives to imprisonment. These commitments provide a basis for reducing the number of people entering prison and the time they remain there.

At the same time, the Government is expanding the prison infrastructure and investing in additional prison capacity, staffing, and security. It reported that the 1,000-place Landhi Extension Jail had been established and that another 1,000-place prison at Thatta was due to open.[30] In July 2026, the Chief Minister said work was continuing on the Malir Jail Extension.[31] These measures may improve daily management, but they will not resolve overcrowding if admissions and under-trial detention continue to grow at their current rate. They cannot keep pace with the number of people already imprisoned. Even if Landhi and Thatta add 2,000 places to Sindh's current authorised capacity, they would accommodate only around 16% of the prisoners who currently exceed that capacity. Continued prison growth would absorb the new space.

The province should adopt a time-bound implementation plan with clear responsibilities for courts, prosecutors, police, legal-aid authorities, and probation and parole

27. "Heads Roll, over 130 Still at Large after 'Largest Jailbreak' in Karachi," Dawn, June 4, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1915327

28. Ibid.

29. Sindh Chief Minister House, National Conference on Prison Reforms: Address by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah (3 July 2026), facebook.com/watch/?v=1000486936196460

30. Sindh Prisons Dept announces plans for large-scale infrastructure upgrades across jails in province, The Nation (4 Aug. 2025), nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2025/sindh-prisons-dept-announces-plans-for-large-scale-infrastructure-upgrades-across-jails-in-province

31. Salis bin Perwaiz, CM for transforming prisons into centres of reform and human dignity, The News International (3 July 2026), thenews.com.pk/print/1423690-cm-for-transforming-prisons-into-centres-of-reform-and-human-dignity

departments. Progress should be measured through reductions in the number and proportion of under-trial prisoners, shorter periods of detention, increased use of non-custodial measures, and fewer people remaining imprisoned because they cannot afford bail.

Sindh must reduce the number of unresolved cases occupying its prisons. Without that shift, the province will continue spending more simply to manage an overcrowding crisis that the criminal justice system continues to reproduce.

2.3 Three Offence Categories Account for Half of Sindh's Prisoners

Murder, narcotics, and arms cases together account for 12,965 prisoners—almost half of Sindh's entire prison population. In each category, large numbers of people remain imprisoned while their cases are unresolved.

The rise in these prison populations cannot be explained simply as a response to increasing crime. Sindh officials reported an overall decline in serious crime during the first half of 2026, even as police encounters, narcotics arrests, and illegal-weapons recoveries increased. The prison surge appears to reflect intensified enforcement combined with restrictive bail, overburdened or missing courts, and the slow resolution of existing cases.

Murder Cases Are Accumulating Faster Than They Are Resolved

Murder remains the largest offence category. Of the 5,263 people held in murder cases, **4,436 are awaiting trial**.

Murder trials may involve multiple witnesses, forensic and medico-legal evidence, and complex investigations. Delays in producing evidence, absent witnesses, and repeated adjournments can extend detention for years. As bail is also more difficult to obtain in serious cases, delays translate directly into longer periods of imprisonment before guilt has been determined.

Police data further complicates any suggestion that the prison population reflects a general increase in murder. Karachi police reported that deaths during robberies fell from 99 in 2024 to 70 in 2025, while recorded street crime also declined.[32]

The large murder population therefore appears to reflect the slow resolution of serious cases rather than a demonstrated recent rise in murder. Better investigations, reliable evidence and trials without avoidable adjournments are essential both to protect due process and to prevent unresolved cases from continuing to accumulate in prisons.

32. Imtiaz Ali, "Karachi Streets Remain Unsafe for Citizens in 2025," Dawn, January 1, 2026, https://www.dawn.com/news/1964351

Narcotics Enforcement Is Driving New Growth

Narcotics cases are the second-largest offence category and one of the fastest-growing. Sindh holds **5,134 people for drug offences**, an increase of **42.4 % since 2024**.

This rise has occurred alongside a major expansion in enforcement. During the first six months of 2026, Sindh Police conducted more than 7,000 anti-narcotics raids, registered more than 7,400 cases, and arrested over 9,000 people.

The effect of these arrests was intensified by the Sindh Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 2024. The law initially prohibited bail in narcotics cases while requiring special courts to decide them.[33]

By May 2025, **9,676 narcotics cases were pending across Sindh,** including 7,769 in Karachi Division alone but the special courts had not been established yet. The Sindh High Court subsequently directed the Government to establish the required courts and appoint judges without further delay.[34] It also made clear that people could not be kept in prison for years because the Government had failed to establish the institutions required by its own law.

Sindh amended the Act in August 2025 to restore limited access to bail.[35] However, the amendment operates only prospectively. It applies to cases registered on or after 18 August 2025, leaving people arrested before that date subject to the original prohibition.

The 42.4 % rise in narcotics imprisonment therefore reflects the combined effect of intensified enforcement, the original prohibition on bail, delays in establishing special courts, and a bail amendment that excluded earlier cases.

Sindh must ensure that all special courts are operational and adequately staffed, extend meaningful access to bail to earlier cases, and introduce proportionate, non-custodial responses for minor and low-level drug offences. Without these measures, narcotics cases will continue to deepen the province's overcrowding crisis.

Arms Cases Are Almost Entirely Unresolved

The Sindh Arms Act has emerged as the third-largest offence category, with **2,568 prisoners**. Of these, **2,540, or 98 %, are under trial**. Almost the entire population imprisoned under the law therefore consists of people who have not been convicted.

This increase has coincided with intensified enforcement against illegal weapons. Sindh launched Operation Nijaat-i-Mehran in January 2026 against armed groups in the riverine areas.[36] By early February, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) reported 113 encounters, 77 arrests, 27 alleged bandits killed, and 82 wounded. The IGP described the operation as part of a wider effort to disarm and de-weaponise the riverine areas.

The operation continued alongside surrenders, weapons recoveries, and further action against armed groups. At a provincial law-and-order meeting in July 2026, officials

33. Sumair Abdullah, "Sindh CNS Act Bars Trial Courts from Giving Bail in Drug Cases: Judge," Dawn, April 4, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1901897.

34. Ishaq Tanoli, "Sindh Govt Told to Set Up Anti-Narcotics Courts, Appoint Judges Immediately," Dawn, May 3, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1908094.

35. Government of Sindh, The Sindh Control of Narcotic Substances (Amendment) Act, 2025 (18 Aug. 2025), sindhlaws.gov.pk/Setup/Publications_SindhCode/PUB-NEW-25-000069.pdf; Sumair Abdullah, Trial Courts Can Entertain Bail in Drug Cases Registered After Amendment to Narcotics Law, Dawn (15 Sept. 2025), dawn.com/news/1942047

36. Dawn, Imtiaz Ali, IGP Resolves to De-Weaponise Riverine Areas of Sindh, (7 Feb. 2026), dawn.com/news/1971489

also reported a substantial increase in the recovery of illegal weapons and **2,184 police encounters**, compared with 1,574 during the corresponding period of 2025.

The three principal offence categories require different reforms. Murder cases require better investigations and timely trials. Narcotics cases require functioning courts, meaningful bail and reform of punitive provisions. Arms cases require individualised detention decisions and faster resolution. What they share is an urgent need to prevent unresolved cases from continuing to fill Sindh's prisons.

Crime-wise prison population - Sindh

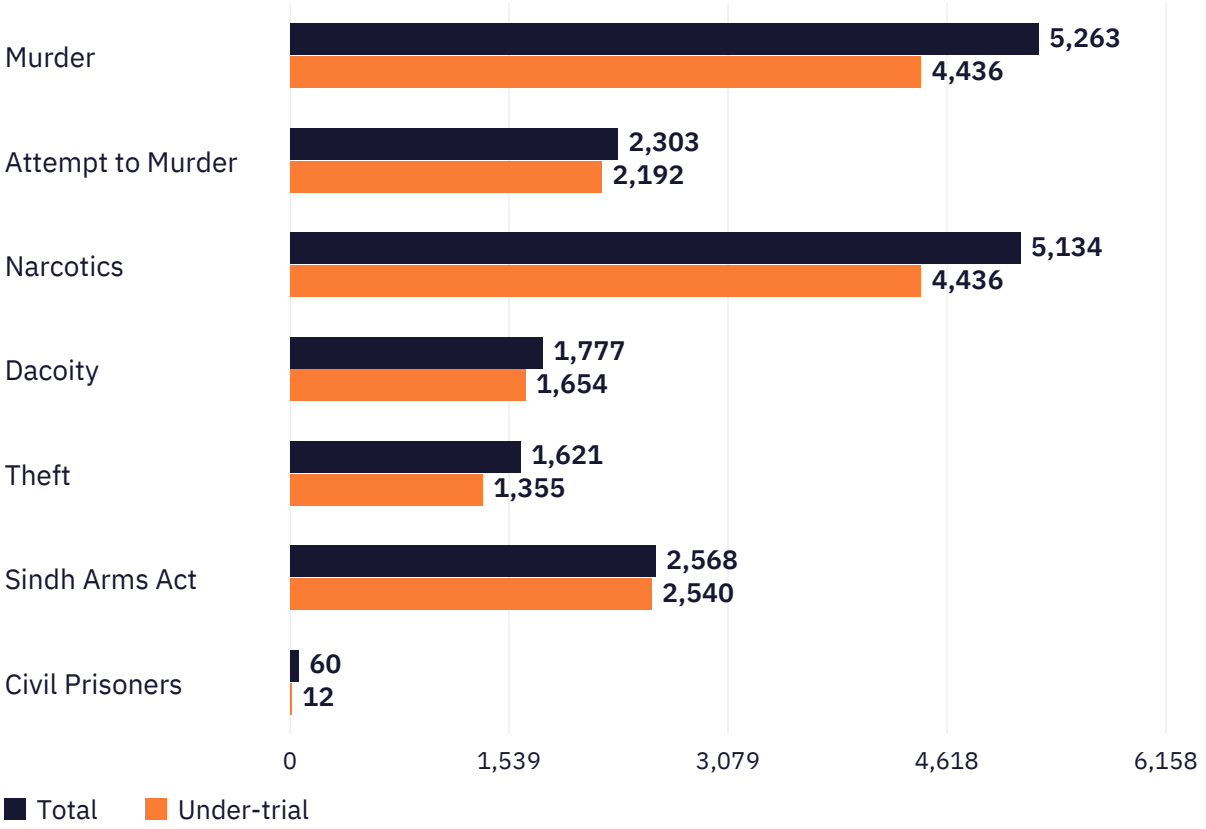


Figure 26. Prisoners by offence in Sindh

2.4 Women's Imprisonment Has Risen by Half in Two Years

Women are one of the fastest-growing groups in Sindh's prisons. Their number rose from **269 in 2024 to 401 in 2026—an increase of 49.1 % in only two years**. This is more than three times the growth of Sindh's overall prison population over the same period.

The increase is being driven overwhelmingly by women awaiting trial. Of the 401 women imprisoned in Sindh, **325—or 81 %—have not been convicted**. Only 76 are serving sentences following conviction. The sharp rise therefore reflects the increasing use and duration of pretrial detention rather than an equivalent increase in convictions.

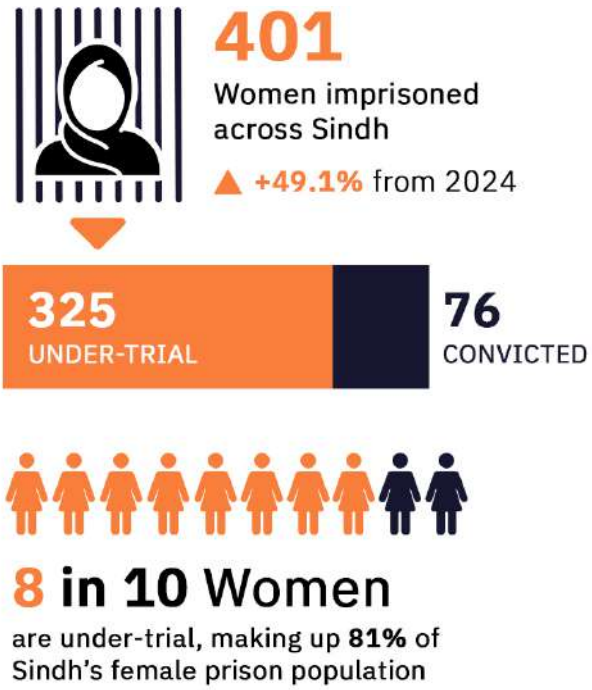


Figure 27. Women prisoners and trial status in Sindh

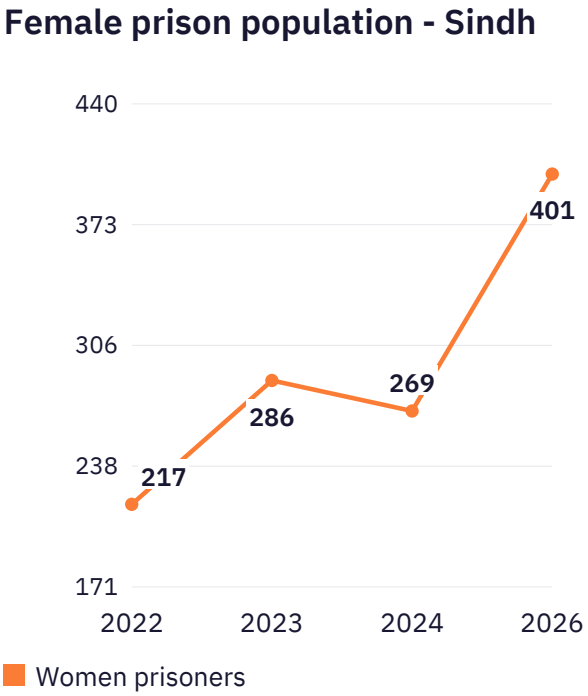


Figure 28. Sindh's female prison population over time

Drug offences are a significant part of this growth. At least **100 women—one-quarter of Sindh's female prison population—are imprisoned under the CNSA**. Of these, 69 are awaiting trial and 31 have been convicted. These figures require closer examination of women's alleged roles. Drug laws determine punishment largely through the type and quantity of substances recovered, without adequately distinguishing major traffickers from couriers or women acting under economic pressure, dependency or coercion.

The original Sindh Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 2024 imposed an absolute prohibition on bail. A 2025 amendment restored a limited power to grant bail but created no specific protection for women. It also applies only to cases registered on or after 18 August 2025. Women arrested under the earlier law therefore remain subject to its complete prohibition on bail.

The imprisonment of 69 under-trial women in narcotics cases shows that the amendment has not ensured meaningful access to release. Sindh should review every woman detained under the original prohibition and amend the law so that courts can consider her alleged role, health, caregiving responsibilities, exposure to coercion, and ability to comply with non-custodial conditions. Bail must also be practically accessible and should not depend on financial or property-based sureties that women living in poverty cannot provide.

Women's detention has consequences beyond prison. Many women are primary caregivers, and their imprisonment can leave children without stable care, interrupt education and remove essential household income. These consequences are particularly difficult to justify where a woman has not been convicted and could safely remain in the community while her case proceeds.

Sindh operates three dedicated women's prisons, but it does not publish sufficient data on women's health, caregiving responsibilities, access to legal representation or the children affected by their detention. Nor does it report how many women have been granted bail but remain imprisoned because they cannot provide sureties.

The 49.1 % rise requires an immediate province-wide review of women's detention. Every under-trial woman should receive legal assistance and an individual assessment of her eligibility for bail or another non-custodial measure. Priority should be given to pregnant women, primary caregivers, older women, women with disabilities, survivors of violence, and those accused of minor or non-violent offences.

Sindh should also publish sex-disaggregated data on arrests, offences, alleged roles, bail decisions, surety requirements, time spent in detention, and case outcomes. Its response should not be to expand women's prison capacity, but to identify why so many more women are entering prison, and remove the legal and financial barriers preventing their release.

Key observations

• Sindh holds **401 women in prison**, compared with 269 in 2024.

• The female prison population increased by **49.1 % in two years**.

• **325 women—81 %—are awaiting trial.**

• At least **100 women** are imprisoned in narcotics cases, including 69 awaiting trial.

• The 2025 Sindh CNSA amendment contains **no specific bail protection** for women.

• Sindh should prioritise custody reviews, accessible bail, and non-custodial measures rather than additional prison capacity.

Crime-wise female population - Sindh

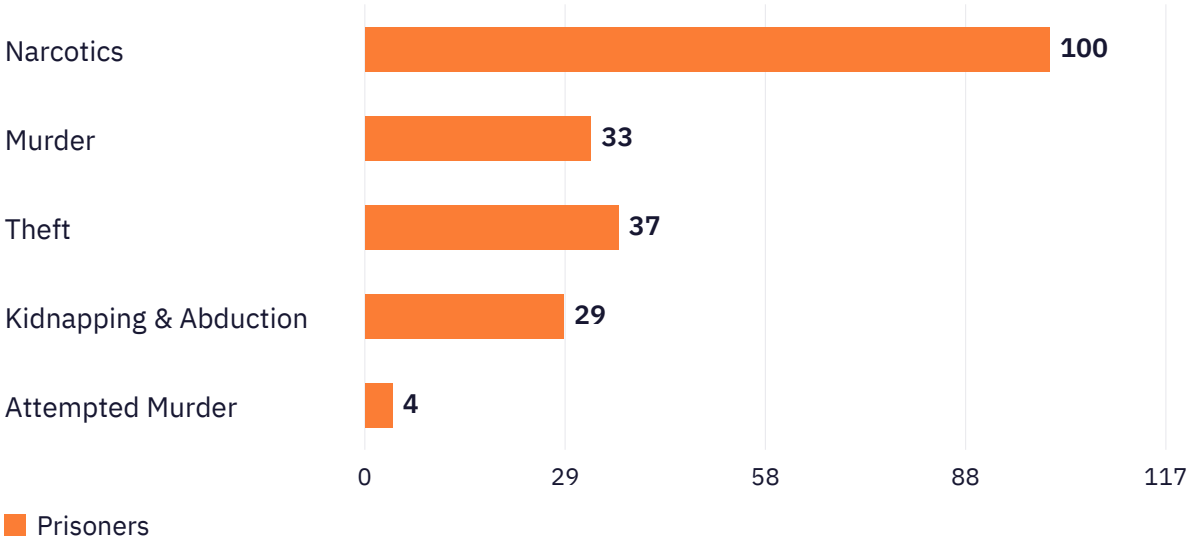


Figure 29. Offences of women prisoners in Sindh

2.5 Almost Every Child in Sindh's Prisons Is in Pre-Trial Detention

Sindh holds **276 children in prison, 265 of whom—96%—are awaiting trial**. Only 11 are serving sentences. The total has fallen from **315** in 2024 but detention before conviction still accounts for nearly all children in custody. The NCRC reports that **1,204 children entered Sindh's juvenile and correctional facilities during 2025**.[37] The number held at any one time therefore understates how many children experience detention each year.

96.0% (265 of 276)
Under-trial rate among Sindh's juvenile prisoners

Alternatives Exist but Are Barely Used

The Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018 provides for legal assistance, bail, and diversion. Yet Sindh reported **only five children released on probation in 2025**. These releases cannot be compared directly with annual admissions, but they show how rarely this particular alternative was used. In 2024, the province had **16 probation officers and 14 parole officers**.[38] Sindh should report how many children are referred for diversion, receive early legal assistance, and leave custody without waiting for trial.

Detention Must Be Reviewed, Not Allowed to Run On

Legal help and affordable bail can determine whether a child remains imprisoned. The Supreme Court held in *Mehran v Ubaid Ullah*[39] that a child detained for more than six months without completion of trial is entitled to bail where the delay is not attributable to the child or someone acting on their behalf. Sindh should therefore record how long each of its **265 under-trial children** has been detained, bring eligible cases before the courts immediately, and ensure that lack of surety does not defeat an order for release.

Release Must Lead to Protection

Children leaving custody may need family reunification, education, treatment, or protection from abuse. The Sindh Child Protection Authority received **1,927 cases in 2025**, showing an existing service that should be connected to juvenile justice. Every child's release plan should identify a safe family placement or appropriate child-protection support. Sindh's immediate task is to review all **265 under-trial cases**, secure release wherever the law permits it, and make detention a genuine last resort.

Key observations

- **265** of Sindh's 276 imprisoned children are awaiting trial.
- **1,204** children entered juvenile and correctional facilities in 2025.
- Only **five children** were reported released on probation that year.
- Every **under-trial child** needs a recorded detention period, legal assistance, and an individual bail review.

37. National Commission on the Rights of Child, The State of Children in Pakistan 2025 (Islamabad: National Commission on the Rights of Child, 2026), 173, https://ncrc.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/State-of-Children-2025.cdr_.pdf.

38. NCRC, State of Children in Pakistan 2024, 117

39. Mehran v. Ubaid Ullah and Others, PLD 2024 SC 843 (Supreme Court of Pakistan, May 29, 2024)

Crime-wise juvenile population - Sindh

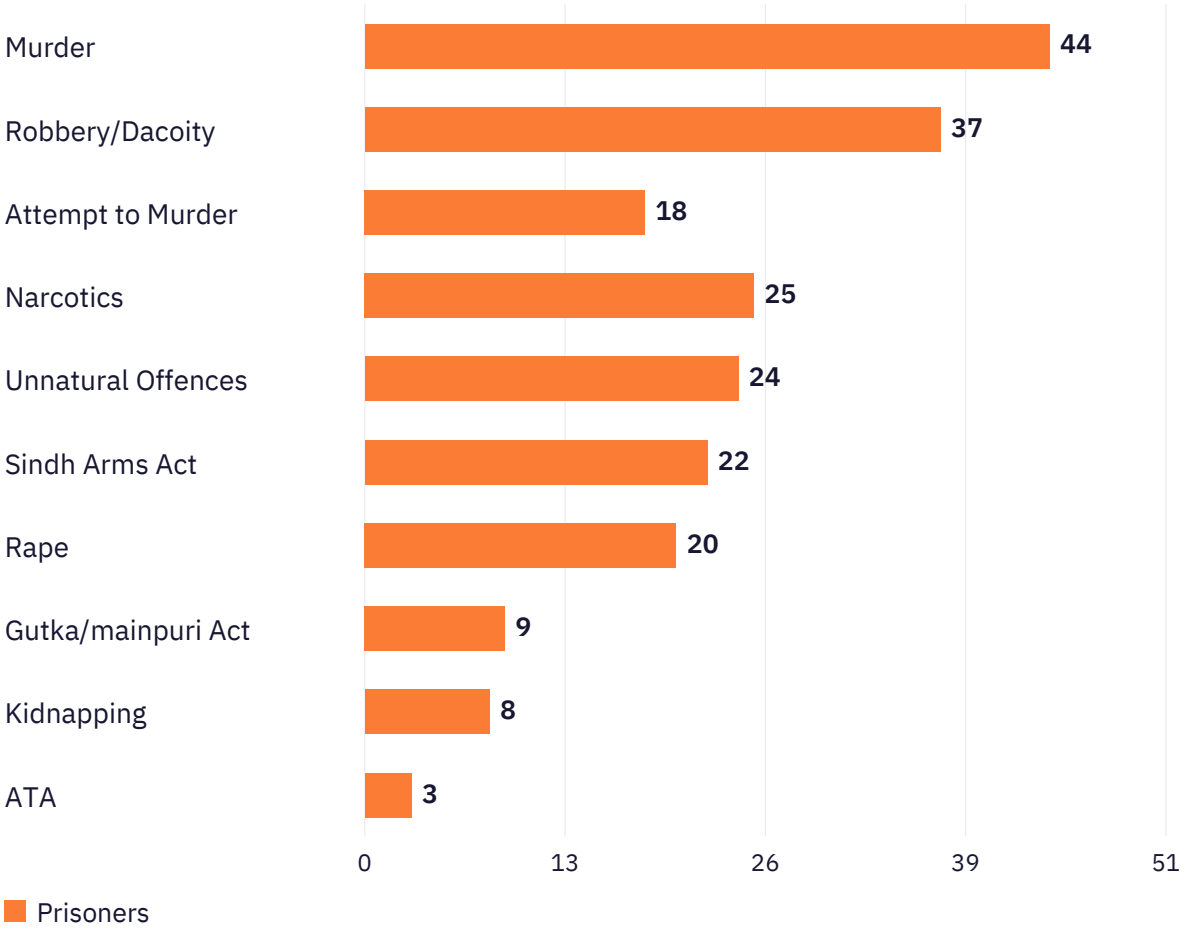


Figure 30. Offences of juvenile prisoners in Sindh

2.6 Infrastructure, Healthcare, and Sanitation

Sindh has Pakistan's most developed network of specialised prisons, including three dedicated women's prisons and three separate juvenile facilities. That structure, and a larger prison budget, have not protected prisoners from severe overcrowding, inadequate healthcare and poor sanitation.

Figure 31. Prison facilities in Sindh

Investment Has Focused on Security and Prison Space

Following the Malir jailbreak, the Prisons Department announced plans to recruit 6,000 staff, install CCTV cameras, wireless systems, command-and-control rooms and body scanners, and purchase 80 vehicles and 40 ambulances. It also reported that the 1,000-place Landhi Extension Jail had been established and that another 1,000-place prison at Thatta was due to open[40]. In July 2026, the Chief Minister said work was continuing on the Malir Jail Extension.[41]

These measures may improve security and daily management. They cannot keep pace with the number of people already imprisoned. Even if Landhi and Thatta add 2,000 places to Sindh's current authorised capacity, they would accommodate only around 16% of the prisoners who currently exceed that capacity. Continued prison growth would absorb the new space.

Healthcare Needs Permanent Staff and Public Scrutiny

Prison healthcare is administered by the Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service under the Home Department, with support from the provincial Health Department. Medical camps have brought screening, tests, medicines and specialist care into some prisons. A camp at District Jail Shaheed Benazirabad provided these services in July 2025, and other camps have offered specialist care in Karachi.[42]

However, camps cannot replace permanent medical staff, uninterrupted treatment or reliable referrals. In July 2026, the Chief Minister said prisoners were screened on admission and every prison had medical

40. Sindh Prisons Dept announces plans for large-scale infrastructure upgrades across jails in province, The Nation (4 Aug. 2025), nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2025/sindh-prisons-dept-announces-plans-for-large-scale-infrastructure-upgrades-across-jails-in-province

41. Salis bin Perwaiz, CM for transforming prisons into centres of reform and human dignity, The News International (3 July 2026), thenews.com.pk/print/1423690-cm-for-transforming-prisons-into-centres-of-reform-and-human-dignity

42. Associated Press of Pakistan, Free medical camp organized at District Jail Shaheed Benazirabad (16 July 2025), app.com.pk/domestic/free-medical-camp-organized-at-district-jail-shaheed-benazirabad/.

facilities. He also said 12 psychologist posts had been created, but those posts had yet to be filled.[43]

Overcrowding Is Making Living Conditions Unsafe

Central Prison Karachi and District Prison Malir together hold **12,587 prisoners—almost half of Sindh's prison population—in facilities designed for 4,600**. Their combined occupancy is approximately **274%**. Toilets, water supplies, kitchens and medical facilities built for far fewer people cannot meet that demand.

JPP's interviews indicate that some prisons have one toilet for approximately 30 prisoners and that lice, fleas, scabies and other skin conditions are common. Crowding makes hygiene harder to maintain and increases the risk that illness will spread. Every unnecessary period of under-trial detention adds to this pressure. Better facilities are urgently needed, but reducing avoidable detention is also necessary to make those facilities usable.

Sindh should prioritise clean water, functioning toilets and bathing facilities, pest control, bedding, permanent medical staff and uninterrupted medicines in Karachi and Malir. It should publish annual prison-level data on expenditure, staffing, medicines, sanitation, disease screening and deaths in custody. Until those figures are available, the **20.8% budget increase cannot be taken as evidence that prisoners' living conditions have improved**.

43. Asim Yasin, 2,084 women prisoners in country's jails, NA told, The News International (12 Apr. 2025), thenews.com.pk/print/1300525-2-084-women-prisoners-in-country-s-jails-na-told

3. Punjab

Punjab At A Glance

Punjab holds **68,726 people** across 45 prisons—**62.2 %** of Pakistan's entire prison population. Its prisons have an authorised capacity of 38,930, leaving the province with **29,796 people above capacity**. Although Sindh now has the country's highest provincial occupancy rate, Punjab remains the principal driver of national prison growth because of the scale and speed of its expansion.

Since 2022, Punjab has added more than 18,000 prisoners. Over the same period, the proportion of people awaiting trial has risen sharply. Punjab's prison crisis is therefore not simply one of insufficient space. More people are entering custody and remaining there than the criminal justice system can process or release.

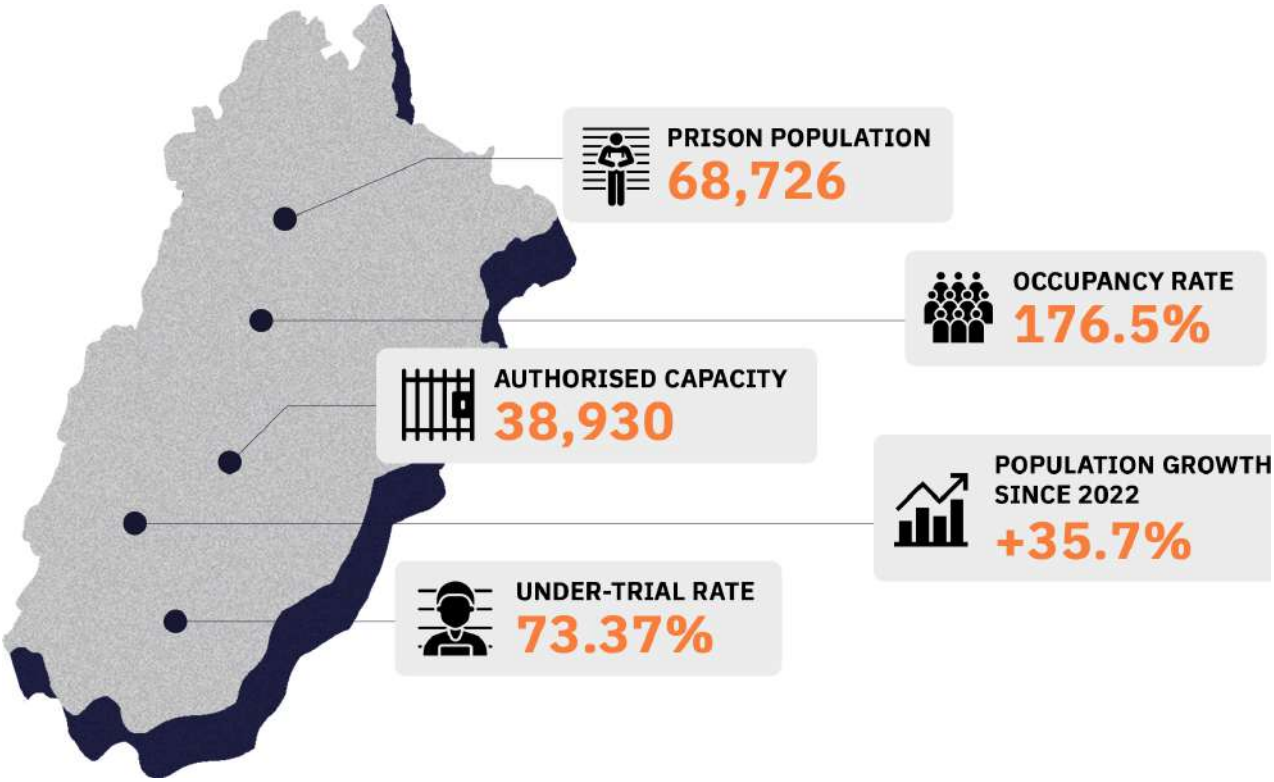


Figure 32. Punjab prison population overview

3.1 Rapid Prison Growth Has Produced Extreme Overcrowding

Punjab's prison population increased from **50,644 in 2022 to 68,726 in 2026**—an increase of **35.7 % in four years**. This means that the province added 18,082 prisoners in a period when its existing prisons were already operating far beyond their authorised capacity.

The Government of Punjab has acknowledged the problem and set a target of increasing prison capacity to 43,718 places by 2027 through the construction of new jails. This is an important recognition of the pressure facing the prison system. However, even if the target is met, the current prison population would still exceed capacity by **25,008 people**. This calculation also assumes no further growth. If the prison population continues to increase at its recent pace, much of the additional capacity will be absorbed before it can provide any lasting relief.

The pressure is especially severe in Punjab's largest prisons. In January 2026, Central Jail Rawalpindi held **8,104 people against** an authorised capacity of 2,174—an occupancy rate of **372.8 %**. Its 5,968 under-trial prisoners alone are more than two and a half times the prison's total capacity.

District Jail Lahore held **6,376 people** against a capacity of 2,000, producing an occupancy rate of **318.8 %**. Of these, 6,025—or **94.5 %**—were awaiting trial. The prison therefore operates almost entirely as a place of pretrial detention rather than punishment following conviction.

At this level, overcrowding becomes a life-threatening problem affecting virtually every prison service. In October 2025, Punjab's Inspector General of Prisons identified shortages of space, inadequate hygiene, congested family visits, small kitchens and insufficient hospital beds as direct consequences of overcrowding.[44] Monitoring visits to District Jail Lahore also identified inadequate medical services and shortages of basic clothing and footwear.[45] These pressures compound longstanding failures: Human Rights Watch has documented prisoners in Lahore unable to lie down simultaneously or reach toilets at night without stepping over others, alongside widespread scabies and other skin diseases in Pakistan's prisons.[46] Healthcare failures further increase the danger: in August 2025, interruptions in HIV medication were reported among prisoners in Punjab.[47]

Overcrowding makes maintaining hygiene, identifying illness and providing timely treatment harder, while cramped living conditions also increase tension and the risk of violence.

Punjab cannot build its way out of this crisis. New infrastructure may provide temporary relief, but it cannot keep pace with prison growth unless the province also reduces unnecessary admissions and the length of time people remain in custody. This requires urgent action on under-trial detention and on the laws and criminal justice practices driving incarceration.

44. Xari Jalil, The Prison System at Breaking Point: District Jail Lahore and the Call for Reform, Voicepk.net (27 Oct. 2025), voicepk.net.

45. Ibid.

46. Human Rights Watch, "A Nightmare for Everyone": The Health Crisis in Pakistan's Prisons (29 Mar. 2023), sections III–IV, hrw.org

47. Asif Chaudhry, 'Overcrowded' Adiala Jail Has the Most HIV-Positive Inmates, Dawn (30 Aug. 2025), dawn.com/news/1938270

Key observations

• Punjab's prison population has increased by **35.7 % since 2022**.

• The province added **18,082 prisoners in four years**.

• Punjab currently holds **29,796 people above its authorised capacity**.

• Central Jail Rawalpindi is operating at **372.8 %** of capacity.

• District Jail Lahore is operating at **318.8 %** of capacity, with under-trial prisoners making up **94.5 %** of its population.

• Planned prison construction will not provide lasting relief unless the drivers of incarceration are also addressed.

Figure 33. Punjab prison capacity, overcrowding and trial status

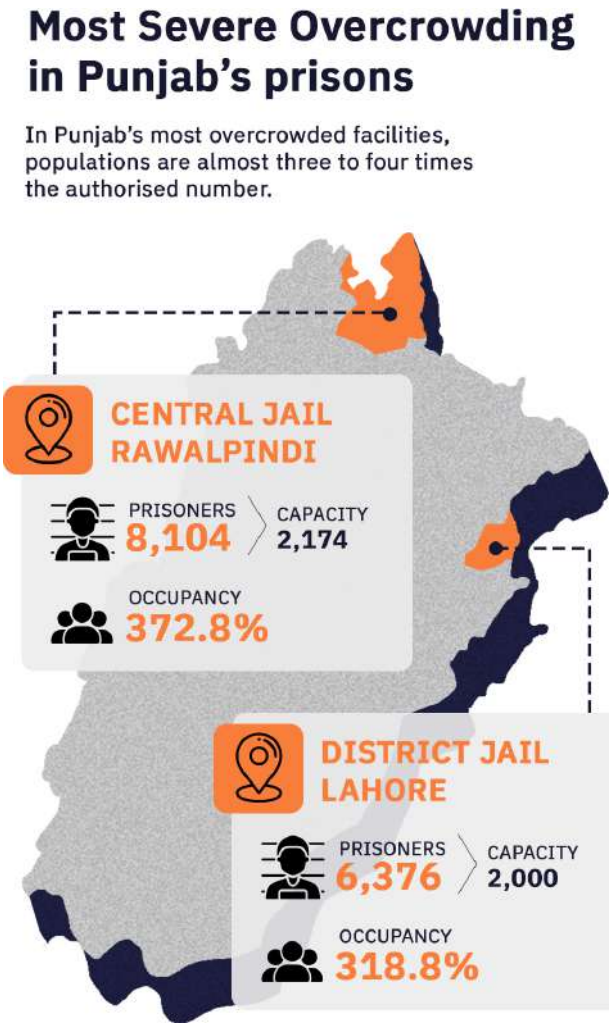


Figure 34. Punjab's most severely overcrowded prisons

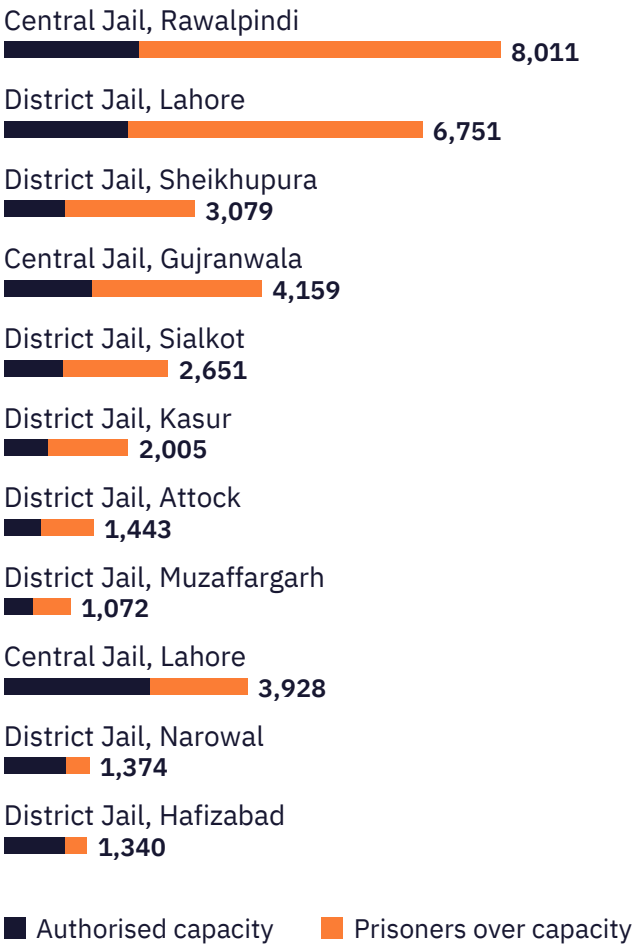


Figure 35. Population and capacity of Punjab's most overcrowded jails

3.2 Under-Trial Detention Is Driving Prison Growth

Punjab's prison population growth is being driven disproportionately by prisoners awaiting trial. Punjab's under-trial population has expanded substantially faster than its overall prison population. The under-trial share rose from **61.6% in 2022 to 73.37% in 2026**, an increase of 13 percentage points. Punjab now holds nearly as many people in pre-trial detention as its entire prison population in 2022, with people being sent to prison faster than courts can conclude their trials.

The scale of the increase indicates pressure across several stages of the criminal justice process. Bail may be denied or conditioned on financial and property-based sureties that indigent defendants cannot furnish, while delays in investigation and trial extend the period for which accused persons remain

incarcerated once remanded. As these periods accumulate across tens of thousands of cases, under-trial detention has become the main driver of prison growth.

Punjab's overcrowding cannot therefore be sustainably reduced without targeted measures at reducing its under-trial population. Building additional accommodation may change the number of available prison places, but it does not alter the rate at which people are remanded, denied access to bail, or remain incarcerated while cases are unresolved.

Population by trial status - Punjab

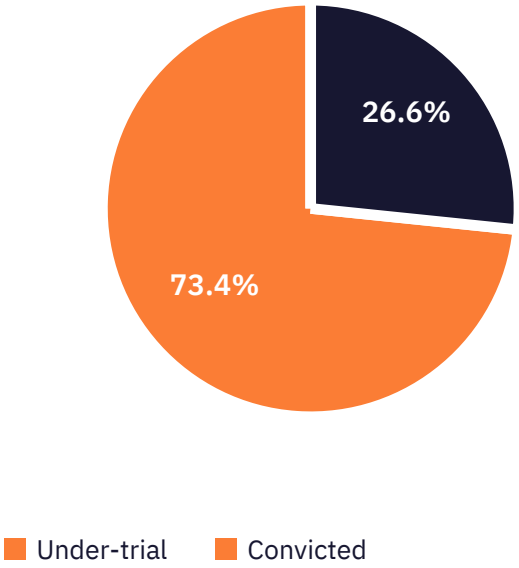


Figure 36. Trial status of prisoners in Punjab

Under-trial rate - Punjab

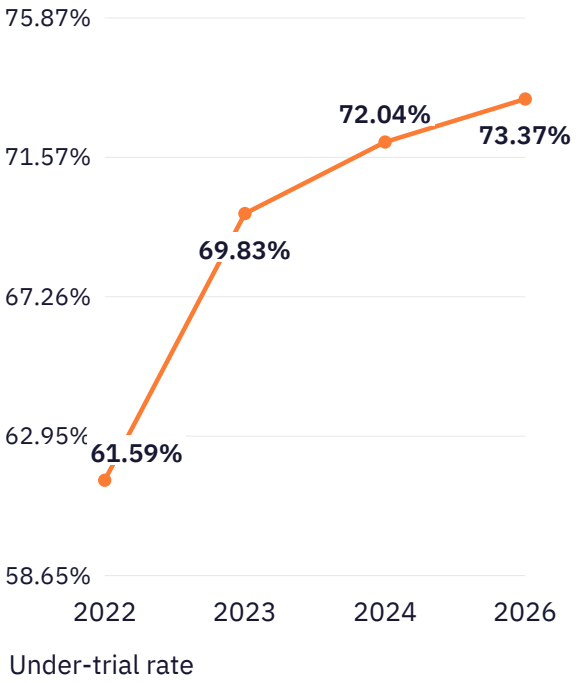


Figure 37. Punjab's under-trial rate over time

3.3 Narcotics Are Now Punjab's Largest Offence Category

No offence category has contributed more to Punjab's recent prison growth than narcotics. The number of people imprisoned under the CNSA increased from **9,151 in 2023 to 18,543 in 2026**, an increase of **102.6 % in three years**.

Punjab now imprisons more people for narcotics offences than for any other offence.

CNSA prisoners account for approximately **27 %** of the province's entire prison population and substantially outnumber the 13,577 people imprisoned in connection with murder, **6,787 of whom are awaiting trial**. Together, narcotics and murder cases account for 32,120 people—**46.7 % of Punjab's prison population**.

Around **80 % of Punjab's CNSA prisoners are awaiting trial**. The rapid increase therefore does not primarily represent people serving

sentences after conviction. It reflects the large-scale arrest and continued detention of people whose cases have not yet been decided.

Punjab's legal framework makes imprisonment difficult to avoid and release difficult to secure. In 2024, the Inspector General of Punjab Prisons reported an increase of approximately 12,000 prisoners following the 2022 federal CNSA amendment, which introduced harsher sentences and restricted access to probation and parole.[48]

The Punjab Control of Narcotic Substances Act 2025 retained restrictions on remission, probation and parole, subject to limited exceptions for women and children. It also permits detention for investigation for up to **90 days**, through successive remand orders of no more than 15 days.[49] These provisions increase the length of time that people can remain imprisoned both before and after conviction.

A further amendment in November 2025 imposed additional restrictions on bail. It bars bail for offences punishable with life imprisonment. For other offences, bail should ordinarily be refused unless the court considers the case suitable, and release may be made conditional on substantial financial security.[50] These provisions make pretrial detention the default response in many narcotics cases.

The growth in narcotics imprisonment has coincided with a major expansion of provincial drug enforcement. Punjab established the Counter Narcotics Force in July 2025, filling 866 posts and creating stations and regional directorates across every division[51]. By June 2026, the force reported conducting more than 2,250 operations and seizing 24.5 tonnes of narcotics.[52] Punjab Police separately registered **26,151 narcotics cases in the first half of 2026**.[53]

Enforcement figures are not equivalent to prison admissions. They nevertheless show the scale at which new cases are entering a criminal justice system that already struggles to provide timely trials and affordable bail. Expanding arrests without corresponding investment in courts, legal aid and non-custodial responses will continue to increase the number of people held in prison awaiting trial.

More recent official statements suggest that the number imprisoned may have continued to rise. In August 2026, the Director General of the Punjab Counter Narcotics Force stated that approximately **21,000 people in Punjab's prisons were incarcerated in cases involving drug use, sale or trafficking**.[54] Although this later estimate has not been independently verified and may use a broader classification, it suggests that narcotics-related imprisonment may have increased further since the prison data were collected by JPP.

48. National Commission for Human Rights, National Academy of Prisons Administration, and Justice Project Pakistan, Prison Data Report 2024: Pakistan's Prison Landscape: Trends, Data, and Developments in 2024 (January 2025), 13–14,Prison Data Report 2024.

49. Government of Punjab, Punjab Control of Narcotic Substances Act 2025, sections 9(4)–(5) and 41(4), Punjab Gazette (5 Aug. 2025), Act text

50. Government of Punjab, Punjab Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2025, Act XC of 2025, section 3, Punjab Gazette (12 Nov. 2025), punjablaws.punjab.gov.pk

51. Directorate General Public Relations, Government of Punjab, CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif Launches Pakistan Ist Counter Narcotics Force (CNF) (22 Jul. 2025), dgpr.punjab.gov.pk.

52. Safdar Rasheed, CNF foils supply of 24.5 tonnes of narcotics in 9 months, Business Recorder (28 Jun. 2026), brecorder.com

53. Punjab Police.(2025).Performance Statistics.Punjab Police. https://punjabpolice.gov.pk/performance-stat

54. Home Department Punjab, Secretary Home Reaffirms Commitment to a Drug-Free Punjab During DG CNF's Farewell Meeting, Facebook (7 Aug. 2026), facebook.com.

Punjab's drug policy is therefore directly shaping its overcrowding crisis. Reducing that pressure requires the provincial legislature to restore meaningful judicial discretion over bail, probation and parole; ensure proportionate sentences; and distinguish between drug use, low-level possession and serious trafficking. People accused of minor and non-violent drug offences should not be subjected to prolonged imprisonment where treatment, diversion or another non-custodial response would be more effective. Without these changes, intensified enforcement will continue to fill Punjab's prisons faster than additional capacity can be created.

Crime-wise prison population - Punjab

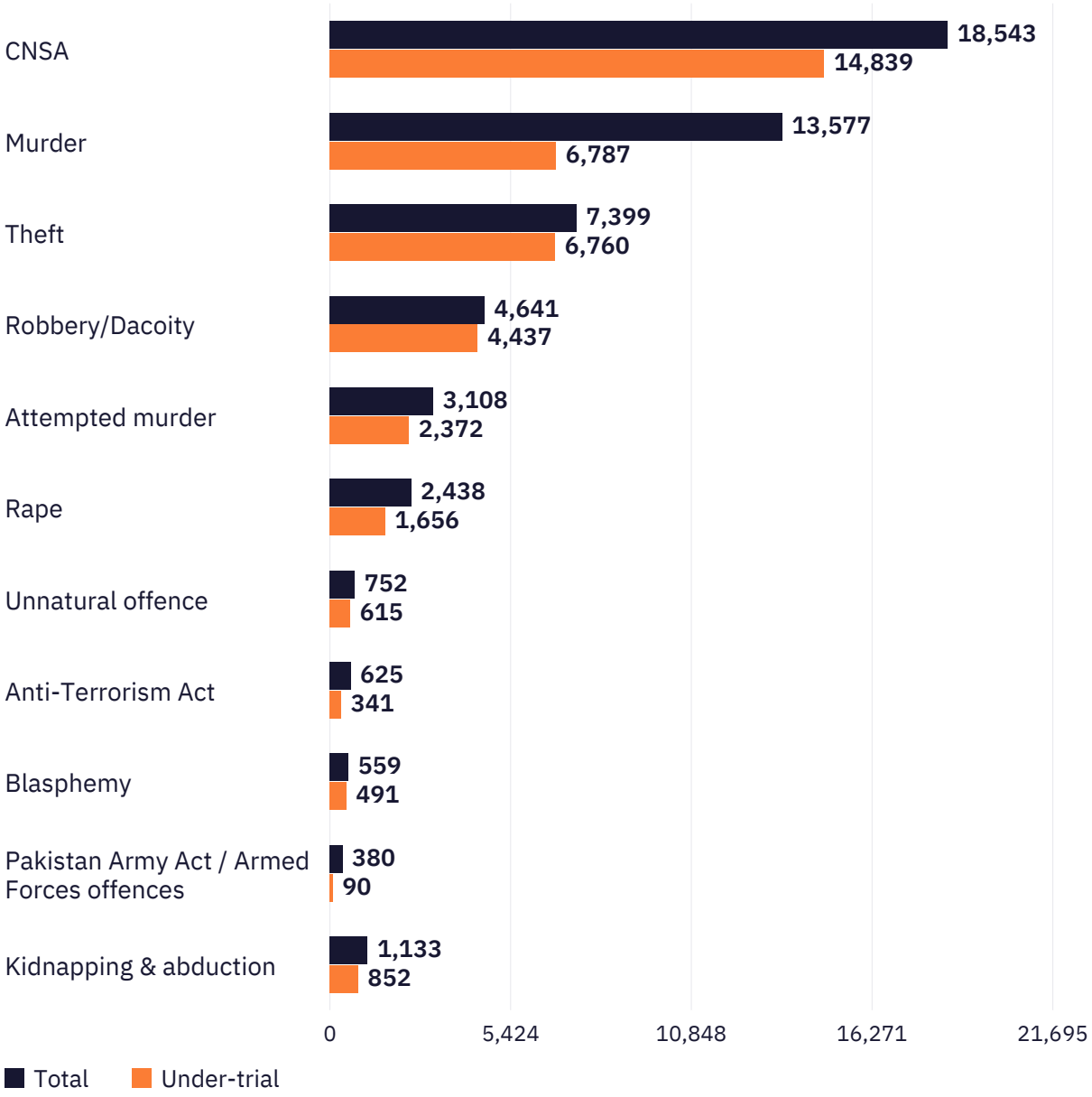


Figure 38. Prisoners by offence in Punjab

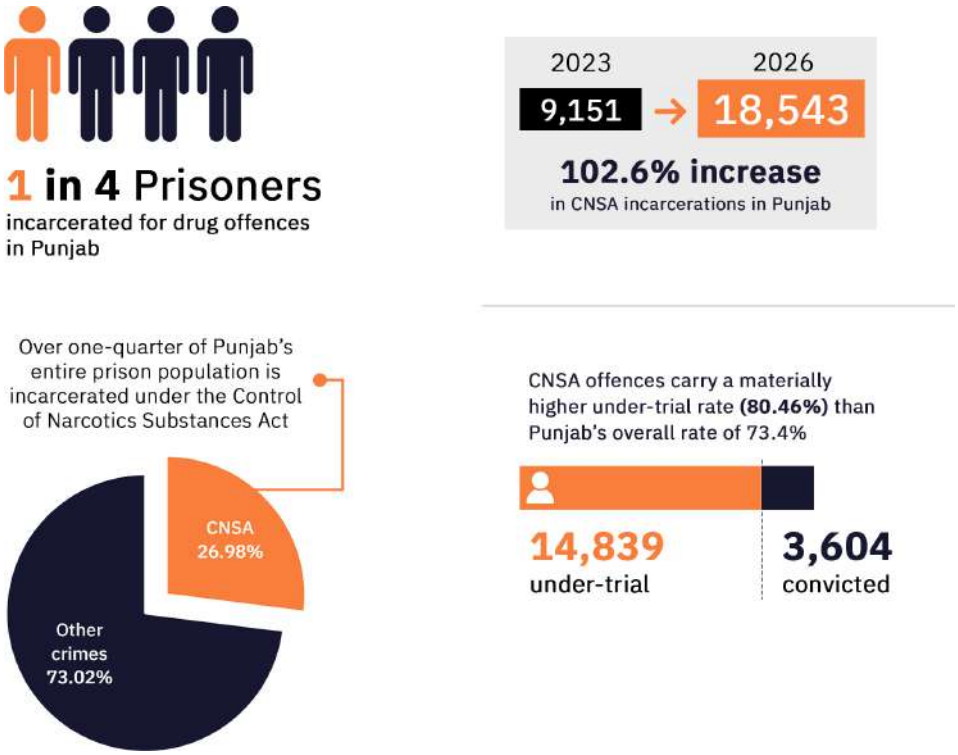


Figure 39. Drug-related imprisonment in Punjab

3.4 Probation Is Keeping Prison Growth from Exploding Further

Probation operates at a significant scale in Punjab. In July 2026, **39,358** people were under court-ordered probation, including 39,185 adults and 173 children. This is equivalent to **57 %** of Punjab's prison population. The scale demonstrates how important non-custodial sentencing is in preventing further pressure on an severely overcrowded prison system.

Probation is used across the province, but caseloads vary considerably. Bahawalpur accounts for 4,189 probationers, followed by Okara with 3,001, Bahawalnagar with 2,130, Sargodha with 2,008 and Jhang with 1,969. These caseloads make adequate staffing essential. Probation can provide a credible alternative to imprisonment only where officers have the capacity to assess individual needs, supervise compliance and support rehabilitation. Punjab should also publish staffing levels, caseloads, successful completions and breaches so that the system's effectiveness can be assessed.

Parole remains severely underused. Available figures indicate that Punjab released only seven prisoners on parole in 2024, compared with 1,605 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This leaves a major gap in Punjab's approach to reducing its prison population. Probation can prevent eligible people from entering prison; parole can enable eligible prisoners to complete part of their sentence under supervision in the community.

Punjab's probation caseload shows that alternatives to imprisonment can operate at considerable scale. The province should build on this foundation by properly resourcing probation and substantially expanding the appropriate use of parole. Punjab's own data show that alternatives to imprisonment already work at scale: the most effective way to create prison space is not to build more cells, but to use imprisonment less. Failing to expand these alternatives is a policy choice.

3.5 Poverty Can Determine Who Enters Prison and Who Can Leave

Punjab holds **2,996 people classified as civil prisoners**, representing **4.36 %** of its prison population. This category includes people detained in proceedings involving unpaid debts, family-maintenance obligations and the enforcement of civil decrees rather than conventional criminal offences. This raises serious concerns under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits imprisonment merely because a person is unable to fulfil a contractual obligation.

The criminal justice system also directs substantial resources towards minor and non-violent conduct. In 2026, Punjab Police registered almost **10,000 kite-flying cases**, resulting in a comparable number of arrests[55]. Not every arrest leads to imprisonment, but such large-scale enforcement increases pressure on police stations, courts and an already overcrowded prison system.

Bail Granted, but Freedom Remains Unaffordable

At least **113 people in Punjab's prisons—including 11 children—remained incarcerated despite having been granted bail because they could not provide the required surety**. A court had already decided that their continued detention was unnecessary. They remained in prison solely because they could not afford the conditions of their release.

Moreover, NCHR's monitoring found women at Adiala Jail who had already been granted bail but remained incarcerated because they could not furnish the required surety, illustrating how financial conditions attached to release can convert poverty into continued detention.

These figures show how poverty can affect a person at every stage of the justice process. Financial obligations can lead to detention. Minor conduct can bring people into contact with the criminal justice system. Once bail is granted, unaffordable sureties can prevent them from leaving prison.

Punjab can immediately reduce unnecessary detention by identifying every person held after being granted bail, replacing unaffordable sureties with personal bonds or other proportionate conditions, and ensuring legal assistance for those unable to secure release. Courts should assess a person's financial circumstances before imposing bail conditions and should not allow poverty to turn an order for release into continued imprisonment.

55. Punjab Police, "Kite Flying (01-01-2026 to 30-06-2026)," chart of cases registered and accused arrested by region, Government of the Punjab, accessed October 3, 2026, https://punjabpolice.gov.pk/system/files/pimage5_60.png.

The provincial legislature should also review laws and enforcement practices that use detention in response to unpaid obligations or minor non-violent conduct. Prison should not be used where a proportionate civil, administrative or non-custodial response is available. Without such reform, poverty will continue to determine not only who enters Punjab's prisons, but who is able to leave them.

Beyond the Prison Gates: Police Encounters and the Right to Life

Punjab's prison data capture only one part of the province's criminal justice system. Between 15 April and 15 December 2025, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan documented at least **670 police encounters involving Punjab's Crime Control Department, in which 924 suspects were reported killed**. These deaths occurred outside the ordinary process of arrest, prosecution and judicial determination and therefore raise serious concerns about the right to life, due process and accountability.

Where a person was already in custody or under effective police control, a death may also fall within the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act 2022, which requires investigation by the FIA under NCHR supervision.

The UN Human Rights Committee has called for alleged extrajudicial executions to be promptly, impartially and thoroughly investigated, while the Committee against Torture has called for independent investigation of deaths in custody in accordance with the 2022 Act and the Minnesota Protocol, together with comprehensive public data on deaths and investigation outcomes.

These findings matter to prison reform because the legitimacy of detention depends on the integrity of the wider criminal justice process that precedes it. Reducing overcrowding and improving prison conditions cannot be separated from ensuring that arrest, custody and the use of force remain subject to law, judicial scrutiny and independent oversight.

3.6 Women: A Sharp Rise in Narcotics Related Imprisonment

Punjab holds **1,442 women in prison**, of whom 1,139—or **79 %**—are awaiting trial. Narcotics offences dominate their offence profile. Punjab imprisons 570 women under the CNSA, accounting for **39.5%** of all women in its prisons.

The number of women imprisoned under the CNSA has more than doubled, rising from 271 to 570—an increase of **110.3%**. This growth is particularly significant because Punjab's narcotics law preserves specific protections for women in relation to bail. The continued rise therefore exposes a serious gap between the protection provided by law and its implementation in practice.

443 of the 570 women imprisoned under the CNSA are under trial. Courts and prison authorities should urgently review the cases of women detained for narcotics offences to determine who is eligible for bail or another non-custodial response.

JPP and the NCHR's interviews provide important context for these figures. Women in Punjab's prisons described pathways into drug cases shaped by false implications due to circumstances arising out of poverty, coercion, relationships with men involved in the drug trade, and low-level or courier roles.

> ***At Adiala Jail, 48% of women inmates are incarcerated for drug-related offences, compared to 28% of men. National Commission for Human Rights***

Women's imprisonment also affects people beyond the prison walls. Many women are primary caregivers, and their detention can separate young children from their mothers, remove a household's source of care or income, and place children with relatives who may already have limited means. Women may also enter prison with needs related to pregnancy, reproductive health, trauma, drug dependency or previous violence that facilities designed principally for men are poorly equipped to address.

Case Study: A Mother Imprisoned Under the CNSA

A 38-year-old mother of seven interviewed by JPP was arrested at home on drug-possession charges. At the time, she was breastfeeding her two-year-old daughter and was in the early stages of pregnancy.

According to her account, police searched her home but found no drugs. She was nevertheless arrested and held for two days before a formal case was registered. Her arrest separated her from her youngest child and left all seven children in the care of relatives with limited financial means.

While in custody, she experienced persistent pain and bleeding during her pregnancy. She reported receiving only basic medication and no meaningful specialist care. She later suffered a miscarriage and was taken to hospital only after the pregnancy had been lost.

Her case shows how pretrial detention can disrupt an entire family while exposing women to serious and gender-specific health risks before their guilt has been determined.

Turning Legal Protection into Release

Punjab should conduct regular reviews of all women detained under the CNSA, ensure legal assistance from the earliest stage of proceedings and apply the statutory bail protections available to them in practice. Bail conditions must also be affordable; a formal entitlement to release has little value if a woman cannot provide the required surety.

Courts should consider a woman's role in the alleged offence, history of coercion or violence, pregnancy, health, caregiving responsibilities and economic circumstances before ordering or continuing detention. For women accused of minor or low-level drug offences, treatment, diversion and other non-custodial measures will often be more proportionate than imprisonment.

Figure 40. Women prisoners and trial status in Punjab

3.7 Children in Punjab's Prisons

Punjab held **717 children** in prison in 2026, including 593 awaiting trial. The total has fallen by 18.2 % from 876 children in 2024. This is an important reduction, but **82.7 %** of detained children remain unconvicted. Punjab therefore continues to rely heavily on pretrial detention instead of bail, diversion and community-based supervision.

Prison figures capture only part of children's contact with the criminal justice system. The sharp rise in narcotics-related imprisonment shows that legal protection on paper is not enough. Its effectiveness must be measured by whether fewer women enter prison unnecessarily and whether those entitled to release are actually able to leave.

Crime-wise female population - Punjab

Figure 41. Offences of women prisoners in Punjab

NCRC's State of Children in Pakistan 2025 reports that Punjab Police recorded 1,231 arrests of children in 2025 under the selected Penal Code provisions examined—79 % of the national total. These are arrests, not convictions, and the dataset largely covers sexual and gender-based offences rather than all alleged offences. NCRC notes that Punjab's larger total may reflect its population, reporting capacity, enforcement patterns or higher registration of particular offences.

Punjab has shown that custody is not the only available response. In 2025, 297 children were released on probation, including 268 aged 16 or 17. Punjab accounted for nearly all reported juvenile probation cases. As of July 2026, 173 children remain on probation in Punjab. This is a significant positive development and provides a foundation for expanding diversion and community-based supervision across the province.

Yet the institutions required to make these alternatives routine remain weak. The observation homes and rehabilitation centres required under the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 have not been established. Many children are consequently held in designated barracks inside ordinary prisons, where access to education, vocational training and structured rehabilitation remains limited. Punjab has also not notified the rules required to implement the JJSA fully. Juvenile Justice Committees remain largely non-functional, and probation officers are not consistently involved during police investigations.

An earlier NCHR inquiry into Adiala Jail demonstrated the consequences of these failures. Of the 82 children detained there, 79 were awaiting trial and 29 had no lawyer. Some remained imprisoned even after receiving bail because they could not provide sureties or had no safe place to go. NCHR's intervention secured the release of 75 children, showing how legal representation and prompt judicial review can rapidly reduce unnecessary detention. It also exposed a wider protection gap: a child may receive a release order but remain in prison because the state has made no suitable arrangement for their care.

That gap continues after release. Punjab's principal child-protection law does not cover children involved in criminal litigation. Children leaving prison can therefore fall between the juvenile justice and child-protection systems precisely when they need accommodation, education, counselling and reintegration support. Without a clear referral pathway and statutory responsibility for their care, release may mean returning a child to homelessness, exploitation or the conditions that first brought them into contact with the law.

The UNICEF-supported initiative "Strengthening the Child Justice Sector in Pakistan: Implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018" to strengthen protection for children in conflict with the law provides an opportunity to address these failures.

Efforts to reduce the number of children in detention should be measured by clear outcomes: functional Juvenile Justice Committees, children provided with legal representation, cases diverted, children released without unaffordable sureties and children receiving sustained reintegration support. Effective interventions should then be expanded across Punjab.

Punjab has already demonstrated through probation and targeted legal assistance that fewer children need to be imprisoned. The urgent task is to make these results systematic. The province should notify the JJSA rules, establish functional Juvenile Justice Committees and the facilities required by law, enforce the six-month bail protection and bring children leaving custody within the provincial child-protection framework.

Figure 42. Juvenile prisoners and trial status in Punjab

3.8 Infrastructure, Healthcare and Sanitation Under Extreme Pressure

Overcrowding in Punjab has become a direct threat to health, safety and dignity. **Thirty-two of the province's 45 prisons are operating above capacity.** Punjab's own prison authorities have acknowledged the consequences. In October 2025, the Inspector General of Prisons identified shortages of living space, inadequate hygiene, congested family visits, undersized kitchens and insufficient hospital beds as direct effects of overcrowding.[56] Monitoring visits to District Jail Lahore also identified inadequate medical services and shortages of basic clothing and footwear.

These are not abstract deficiencies. Human Rights Watch documented prisoners in Lahore who could not lie down at the same time or reach toilets at night without stepping over others. It also found that lice, fleas, scabies and other skin diseases were common across Pakistan's prisons. When facilities hold three or four times their intended population, maintaining hygiene, isolating infectious illness and providing timely treatment become increasingly difficult. Cramped conditions also increase tension and the risk of violence.

Crime-wise juvenile population - Punjab

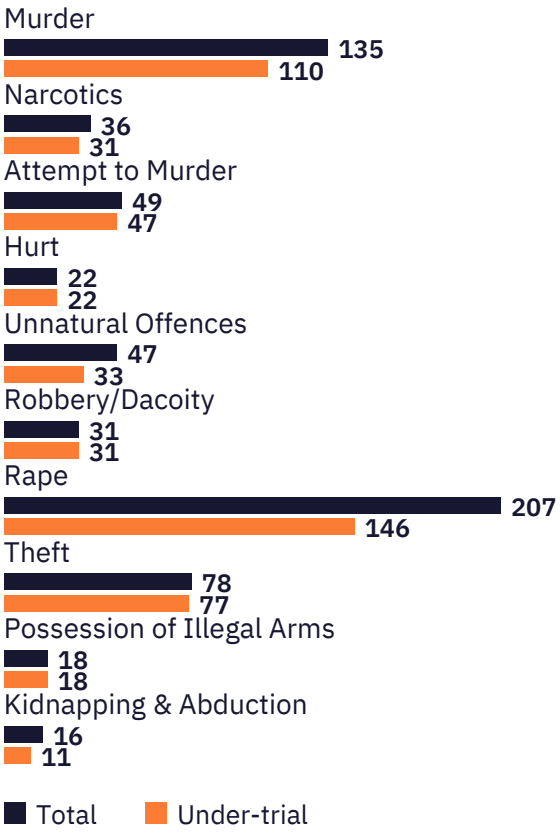


Figure 43. Offences of juvenile prisoners in Punjab

Punjab has invested in prison infrastructure, education and vocational programmes. It also plans to increase authorised capacity to 43,718 by 2027 through the construction of new prisons. On present figures, however, this would still leave the system more than 25,000 places short, without accounting for continued population growth. New buildings may relieve pressure at individual facilities, but they cannot keep pace with a criminal justice system that sends people to prison faster than capacity can be created.

56. Dawn, The Prison Crisis of Pakistan, https://www.dawn.com/news/1893631

Healthcare Exists on Paper but Access Remains Uneven

Punjab Prisons reports that every prison has a hospital, full-time medical officers, medicines, vaccination services and diagnostic equipment. The department lists 92 ultrasound machines, 94 ECG machines, 43 dental units, 30 X-ray machines, 234 oxygen cylinders and 44 ambulances across the prison estate. Management and budgetary control of prison hospitals were transferred to the provincial health department in 2024 to improve service delivery.

Equipment, however, does not establish that healthcare is timely, continuous or accessible. Monitoring findings and prisoner accounts continue to identify inadequate treatment, while the system lacks sufficient psychiatric care, infectious-disease expertise and evidence-based treatment for substance dependence. Overcrowding increases demand for every hospital bed, medicine, diagnostic test and medical officer, reducing the practical value of facilities that may formally exist.

The uneven response to HIV illustrates this gap. Punjab identified **645 prisoners living with HIV across 43 prisons**, including 148 at Adiala Jail, 83 at Camp Jail Lahore and 27 each at Kot Lakhpat and Gujranwala. Yet screening varied sharply between institutions, and several large prisons reported no screening at all. Interruptions in HIV medication were also reported in August 2025. A prison that does not test consistently or provide uninterrupted treatment cannot determine the true scale of infection or prevent avoidable illness and transmission.

Mental Healthcare Remains a Critical Failure

The death of JPP client Sheraz Butt demonstrates the consequences of inadequate mental-health care. Sheraz had documented schizophrenia and was killed by another prisoner in Central Jail Lahore in March 2024. His death exposed the failure to identify, separate and provide appropriate treatment to prisoners with severe psychosocial disabilities.

Punjab has still not fully implemented the safeguards required by the Supreme Court in *Safia Bano v Home Department, Government of Punjab* (PLD 2021 SC 488). These include properly constituted medical

boards, trained personnel and specialised forensic psychiatric facilities for people with severe psychosocial disabilities. Mental illness cannot be managed through confinement alone, particularly in overcrowded prisons where psychiatric staff, treatment and referral pathways remain inadequate.

Sanitation and Gender-Specific Healthcare

Sanitation cannot be separated from prison population levels. Toilets, kitchens, water systems, bathing facilities and waste-disposal arrangements designed for one person must often serve three or four. Under these conditions, renovations and additional equipment provide only limited relief unless the number of people using them is reduced. During a monitoring visit to Kasur Jail, the NCHR found the drainage and sewage systems to be non-functional with stagnant wastewater in the premises, raising concerns for the health of inmates. Similarly, NCHR's monitoring visit to Okara jail revealed a complete absence of adequate medical services for women.

Healthcare planning must also address needs that standard prison services frequently overlook. Women require confidential access to gynaecological and reproductive healthcare, appropriate nutrition during pregnancy, and adequate provision for menstruation and menopause. Children and juvenile girls require age-appropriate healthcare, nutrition and sanitary facilities. These are basic components of humane detention, not optional welfare measures.

Punjab must fill medical and psychiatric posts, provide universal and regular disease screening, guarantee uninterrupted access to essential medicines and implement the mental-health safeguards ordered in *Safia Bano*. Independent inspections should assess whether services are accessible in practice rather than merely recording the existence of buildings and equipment.

But prison departments cannot maintain humane conditions while facilities hold several times the population they were designed to accommodate. For the thousands awaiting trial, every additional month in custody means further exposure to conditions that threaten their health and safety before their guilt has been determined. **Punjab cannot improve prison conditions sustainably without reducing the number of people it imprisons.**

4. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KP At a Glance

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the least overcrowded prison system in Pakistan and the only province operating substantially below its overall authorised capacity. Its 11,521 prisoners occupy **85.6% of available capacity**, compared with 99.6% in Balochistan, 176.5% in Punjab and 193.1% in Sindh. This is particularly significant because KP has achieved this position while reducing, rather than expanding, its prison population: the number of prisoners fell from 13,364 in 2024 to 11,521 in 2026, a decline of 13.8%.

This is a significant shift. The decline has coincided with KP's comparatively extensive use of probation, parole and dispute resolution, implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Act, and judicial interventions to identify prisoners who do not require continued incarceration. Together, these measures show how reducing reliance on imprisonment can relieve pressure on prisons without expanding prison infrastructure. Their contribution should now be documented and evaluated so that successful approaches can be strengthened in KP and replicated in other provinces.

Serious pressures remain. **More than three-quarters of KP's prisoners are awaiting trial**, while **nearly one in three is imprisoned under narcotics laws**—the highest proportion recorded by any province. The province-wide figure also does not mean that overcrowding has been resolved. **Eleven of KP's 33 prisons remain overcrowded**, demonstrating how an apparently favourable provincial average can obscure serious pressure within individual facilities.

KP therefore offers both evidence of progress and a warning against complacency. Its falling prison population provides important lessons for other provinces, but lasting reform will depend on reducing under-trial detention, addressing the laws that continue to drive incarceration and ensuring that lower provincial occupancy produces safer and more humane conditions inside every prison.

Key observations

- KP's prison population fell by **13.8% between 2024 and 2026**.
- Its 33 prisons hold **11,521 people** against an authorised capacity of **13,457**.
- The province is operating at **85.6% of its overall authorised capacity**.
- Despite this provincial average, **11 of its 33 prisons remain overcrowded**.
- **8,874 prisoners, or 77%, are awaiting trial**.
- **26.8% of prisoners are held under narcotics laws**, the highest provincial proportion in Pakistan.

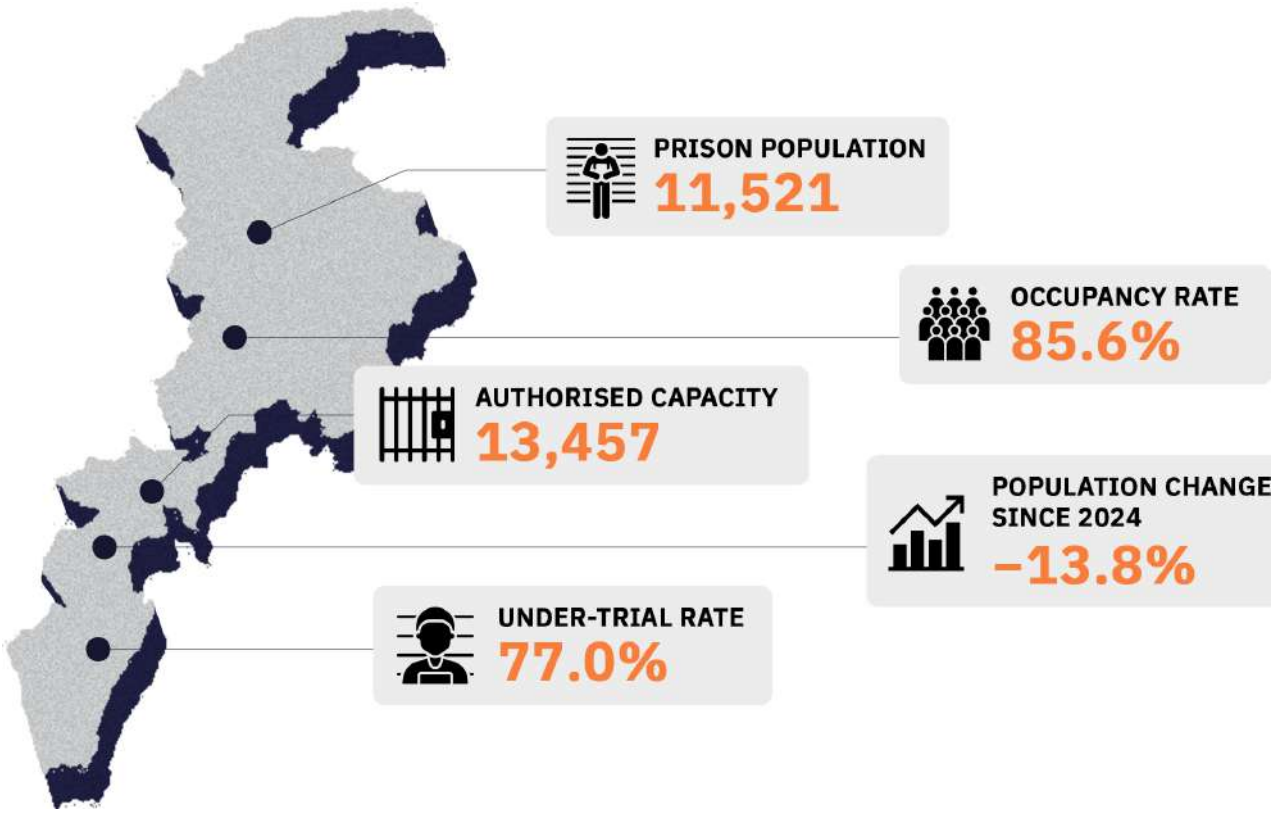


Figure 44. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prison population overview

4.1 A Significant Decline in the Prison Population

KP's prison population remained broadly stable between 2022 and 2024. It fell from **13,606 in 2022 to 13,059 in 2023**, before rising slightly to **13,364 in 2024**. By 2026, however, it had fallen by 1,843 prisoners, representing a reduction of 13.8%, in two years.

This decline is particularly significant because it runs against the national trend. Between 2024 and 2026, Pakistan's prison population increased by **8.3%**, driven largely by continued growth in Punjab and Sindh. KP instead reduced its prison population to **85.6% of its overall authorised capacity** without relying on large-scale prison construction.

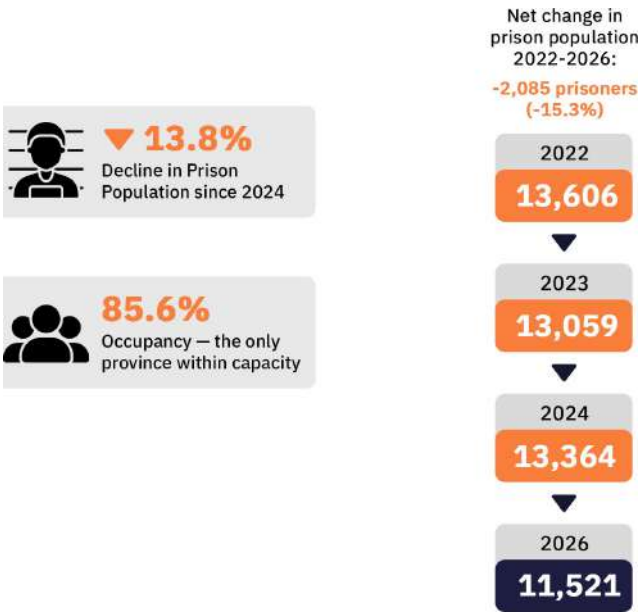


Figure 45. Decline in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's prison population

4.2 Under-Trial Detention is Falling but Remains High

In one of the most significant developments recorded in this report, KP's under-trial population **declined by 17% between 2024 and 2026**, falling from 10,696 to 8,874 prisoners. This was the largest provincial reduction during a period in which Pakistan's overall prison population grew by **8.3%**. The reduction accounts for almost the entire fall in KP's prison population: **1,822 fewer people were being held without conviction**.

This is an important achievement. It shows that significant reductions in imprisonment are possible when the criminal justice system actively reviews who remains in custody. Yet **77%** of KP's prisoners are still under trial. The province may now be operating within its overall capacity, but a prison system in which more than three-quarters of those detained have not been convicted continues to rely excessively on pretrial detention.

Further progress will depend on ensuring timely bail decisions, affordable sureties, access to legal assistance and faster case disposal. In 2026, **146 people remained in KP's prisons after being granted bail because they could not furnish the required surety bonds**. Their continued detention was determined not by the necessity of imprisonment, but by their financial means. Regular review should prioritise these prisoners, people accused of minor offences and those who have spent longer in custody than any likely sentence.

Judicial Review Is Producing Releases

Over a three-month period in 2024, judicial officers in KP secured the release of **1**,289 prisoners charged with minor offences through camp courts.[57] The Chief Justice of Pakistan subsequently called for the approach to be replicated in other provinces.

These releases formed part of a wider judicial reform process. In November 2024, the Chief Justice of Pakistan established a KP subcommittee to examine prison conditions,

57. https://www.app.com.pk/national/cj-launches-push-for-jail-reforms-in-kp/

reduce under-trial detention and expand alternatives to imprisonment. This was followed by a two-day provincial consultation in January 2025 involving the judiciary, prison authorities, government departments, parliamentarians, civil society and prisoners. The initiative subsequently fed into the work of the Provincial Justice Committee and the national Prison Reform Action Plan.

The scale of these releases shows how prison-based judicial review can turn reform commitments into measurable results. Making these reviews a regular practice and publishing their outcomes would help KP sustain its progress while providing a practical model for other provinces seeking to reduce unnecessary detention.

Under-trial rate - KP

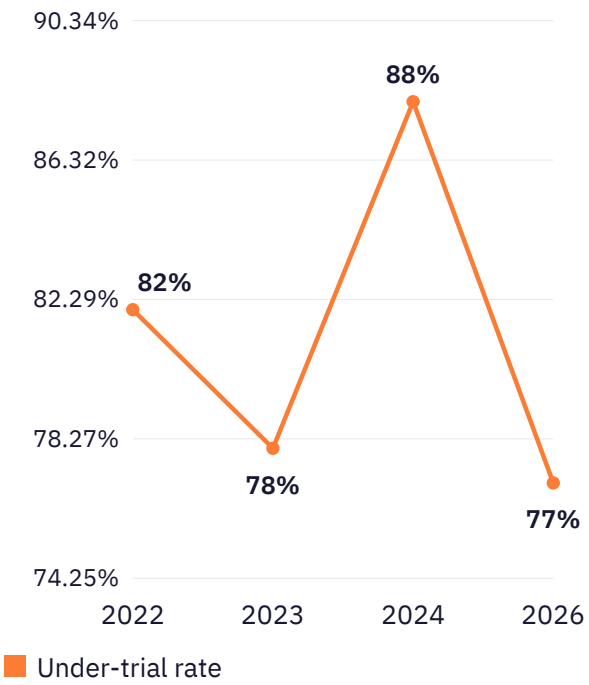


Figure 46. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's under-trial rate over time

Figure 47. Bail and under-trial detention in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

4.3 Community-Based Measures Are Reducing Pressure on Prisons

KP has increasingly relied on community-based measures as an alternative to incarceration. In 2026, approximately **4,300 people were serving sentences on probation**, supervised by **33 probation officers**. The number of people on probation is significant when compared with the province's prison population, demonstrating the scale at which non-custodial sentencing is already operating in KP.

However, the scale of probation also places considerable pressure on the service responsible for administering it. With approximately **4,300 probationers supervised by only 33 probation officers, each officer is responsible for an average of around 130 people**. KP's experience nevertheless demonstrates the potential of non-custodial measures to reduce reliance on imprisonment. The priority should therefore be to strengthen the institutional capacity of the probation service alongside expanding its use. Increasing staffing, improving rehabilitation and reintegration services, and systematically tracking probation outcomes would allow the province to use community-based sentences more effectively as part of a broader strategy to reduce unnecessary incarceration.

4.4 The Prison Population Decline Extends Across Major Offence Categories

KP's declining prison population is visible across several major offence categories. Between 2023 and 2026, the number of people imprisoned in connection with murder fell by 44.6%, from 4,678 to 2,591. Attempted-murder cases declined by 29.1%, from 659 to 467, while cases under the Anti-Terrorism Act fell by 46.1%, from 310 to 167.

The decline also extended to people imprisoned under the Pakistan Army Act, whose number fell by 15.8%, from 449 to 378, and to theft cases, which declined by 10.3%, from 348 to 312.

The breadth of these reductions matters. KP's falling prison population does not result from movement within a single offence category. It reflects substantial declines across several categories that previously accounted for large numbers of prisoners. **Narcotics cases, however, remain the major exception to this progress.**

The breadth of these reductions is important. KP's declining population is not the result of movement within a single offence category: imprisonment has fallen across several categories that previously accounted for significant numbers of prisoners.

Prisoners by offence - KP, 2023 and 2026

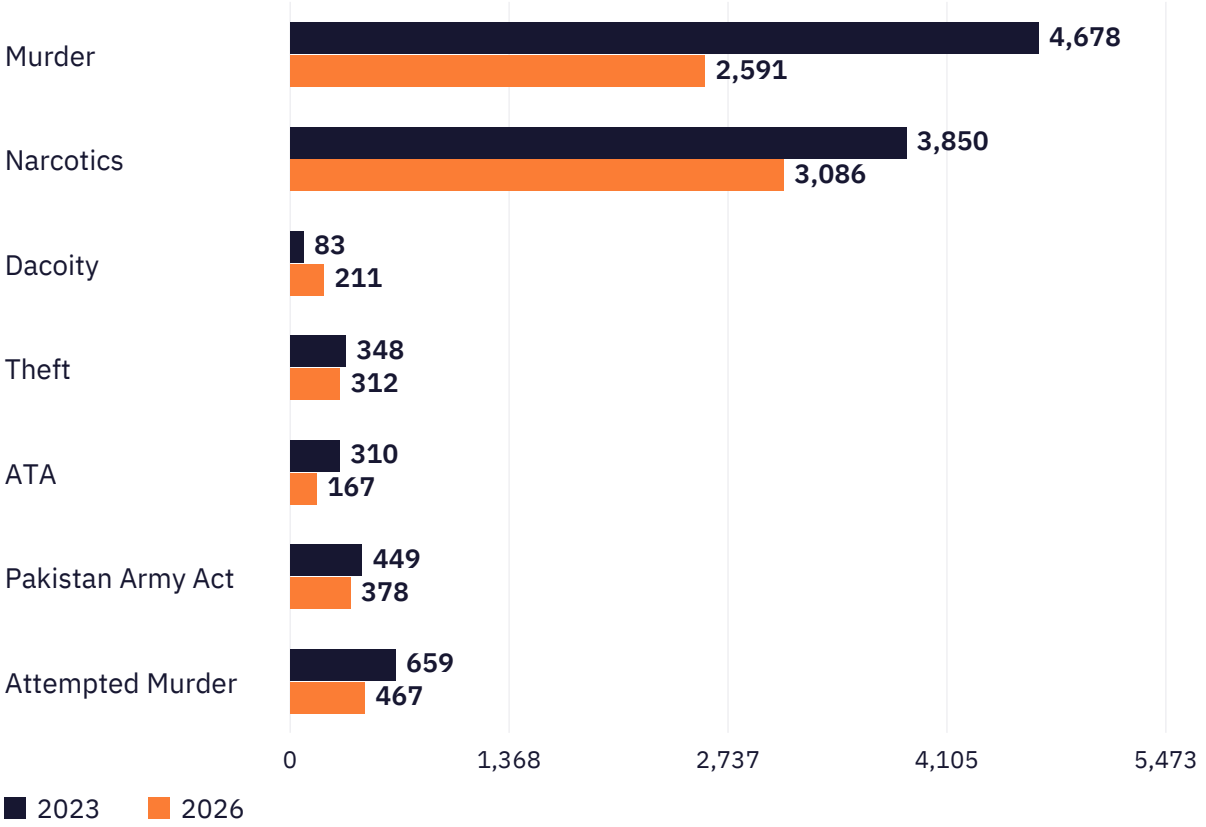


Figure 48. Prisoners by offence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2023 and 2026

4.5 Narcotics Remain the Major Pressure Point

Narcotics imprisonment is the clearest exception to KP's broader progress in reducing incarceration. The province holds **3,086 prisoners under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act**, accounting for **26.8% of its entire prison population**. Of these, **2,707—or 87.7%—are awaiting trial**.

While KP's overall prison population fell by **13.8% between 2024 and 2026**, its CNSA population increased from 2,884 to 3,086—a rise of **7%**. More than one in four prisoners in KP is therefore held in connection with a narcotics offence, and nearly nine in ten of them have not been convicted.

These figures expose the limits of provincial prison reform. Dispute Resolution Committees can resolve appropriate compoundable cases, while probation, parole and diversion can prevent imprisonment or facilitate release in eligible cases. Their impact is restricted, however, when CNSA cases are generally excluded from these mechanisms and remain subject to restrictive bail and sentencing practices.

The consequences of these restrictions are visible in the continuing dispute over sentence remission. In June 2026, the Peshawar High

Court declared unconstitutional an amendment excluding prisoners convicted under the CNSA from remission benefits and directed prison authorities to recalculate the sentences of affected prisoners.[58] In September, 56 prisoners at Peshawar Central Prison filed contempt proceedings alleging that the judgment had not been implemented. They claimed that revised calculations showed they had completed their sentences but remained imprisoned.

KP's experience demonstrates the close relationship between prison reform and CNSA reform. Probation, parole and judicial case review can substantially reduce imprisonment, but they cannot fully offset laws and practices that continue to generate large numbers of drug-related detentions. Sustaining the province's progress will require proportionate sentencing, more accessible bail, non-custodial responses for minor and low-level drug offences, and full implementation of judgments protecting prisoners' eligibility for release.

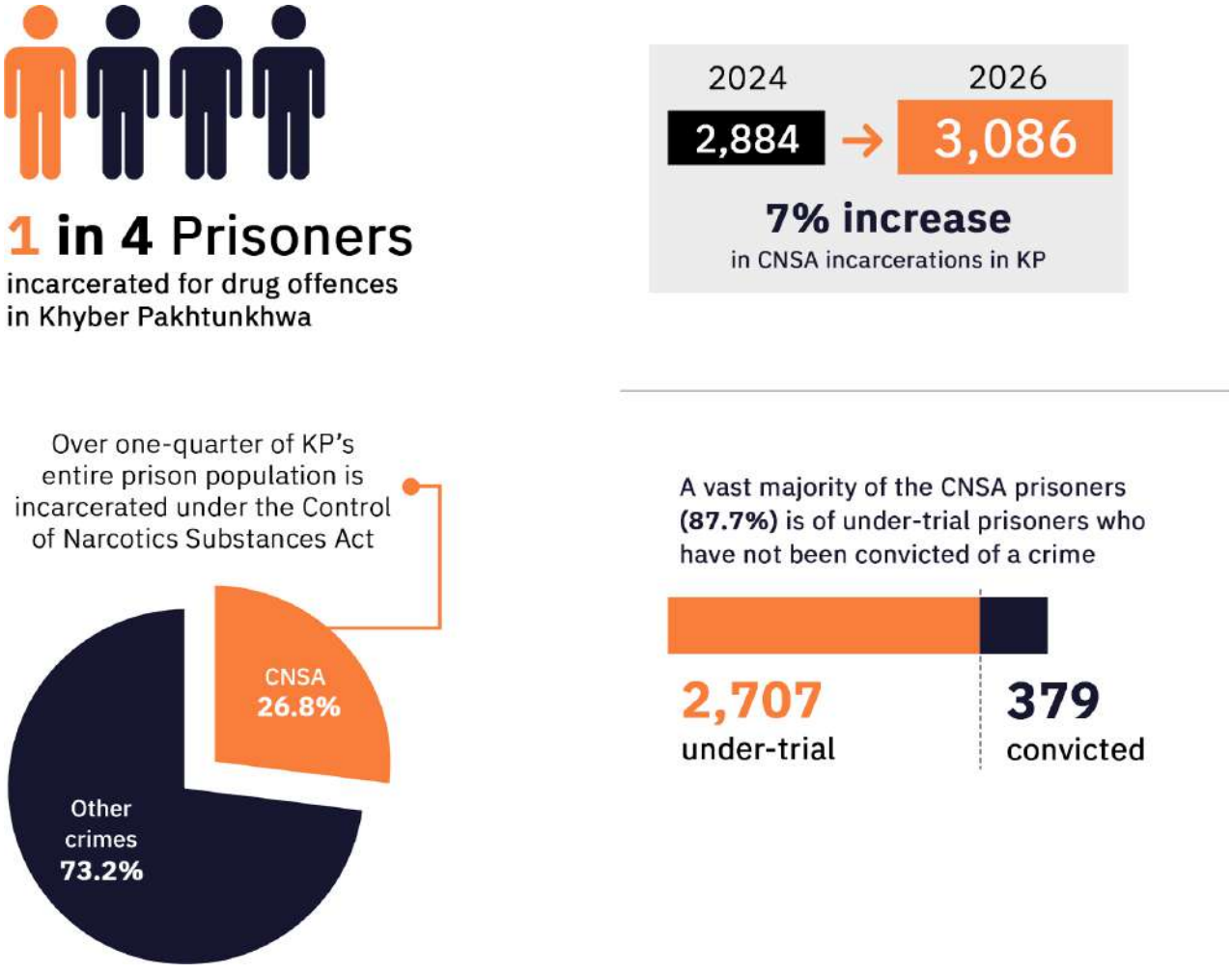


Figure 49. Drug-related imprisonment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

58. Dawn, Bureau Report, Prisoners move PHC against govt for not enforcing judgement on remission, Sep 4, 2026, https://www.dawn.com/news/2027308

4.6 Preventive Detention Remains a Major Transparency Gap

KP's prison data record **1,175 people as "detenues"** under preventive detention orders, equivalent to approximately **10.2% of the province's prison population**.[59] Preventive detention in KP operates through several legal frameworks, including Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance and the laws governing internment in connection with actions in aid of civil power. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has raised serious concerns about the continued operation of internment centres and preventive detention in the province.[60]

The Peshawar High Court has also repeatedly scrutinised preventive detention orders. In *Shah Muhammad Khan v State*, the Court set aside detention orders issued against political workers under Section 3 of the MPO after finding that the authorities had failed to establish the legal basis required for detention.[61] In *Abdul Azeem v District Magistrate*, the Court set aside a one-month detention order directing the petitioner's confinement in Timergara Jail and reaffirmed that preventive detention cannot be used as a substitute for the ordinary criminal process.[62]

UN treaty bodies have also repeatedly called for reform. In 2024, the Human Rights Committee recommended that Pakistan review the Actions (in Aid of Civil Power) Regulation 2011 with a view to repealing it or bringing it into line with international standards, and ensure that no one is held in secret or incommunicado detention.[63] In 2026, the Committee against Torture again raised concern about detention without warrants or judicial supervision and indefinite detention in military internment centres. It called on Pakistan to remove the military's power to establish such centres, provide judicial review of detention and ensure that counterterrorism measures do not result in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing.[64]

This is a substantial population in its own right and requires closer scrutiny because preventive detention operates outside the ordinary process of criminal conviction and sentencing. Without periodic review and scrutiny, more than one in ten people in KP's prisons remain deprived of their liberty under a system whose operation cannot be meaningfully assessed.

59. Preventative detention in Pakistan allows executive authorities and security forces to hold individuals without formal criminal charges to prevent perceived threats to national security, public order, or defense. It operates through the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPOO) 1960, the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997 (including amendments like Section 11EEEE allowing up to 90-day detention), the Security of Pakistan Act 1952, and the Foreigners Act 1946.

60. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Caught in the Crossfire: A Mission to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2025). https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2025-Caught-in-the-crossfire.pdf

61. Shah Muhammad Khan and others v State and others, Writ Petition Nos. 293-B and connected petitions of 2023, decided 2 May 2024, Peshawar High Court, reported as 2025 PCrLJ 80.

62. Abdul Azeem v District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner and others, W.P. No. 120-M of 2025, decided 9 July 2025, Peshawar High Court, reported as 2025 PHC 226.

63. UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan, CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2, 2 December 2024, paras. 24–25, particularly para. 25(b).

64. UN Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan, CAT/C/PAK/CO/2, 15 June 2026, paras. 16–17, particularly paras. 17(b), 17(d) and 17(f). See also paras. 24–25 concerning independent inspection of all civilian and military places of detention.

4.7 Women Have Not Shared in KP's Decline

Women have not shared in KP's overall decline in imprisonment. The female prison population increased from **87 in 2024 to 110 in 2026, a rise of 26.4%**, even while the province's overall prison population fell by 13.8%. Of these women, **86, or 78.2%, are under trial**.

Murder is the largest recorded offence category, accounting for 34 female prisoners. A further **23 women and girls are held under the CNSA**, including six girls. Twenty of these 23 prisoners are awaiting trial. Women and children retain specific protections under the amended CNSA, yet the continued detention of this group indicates that access to bail and non-custodial measures remains limited in practice.

The **Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's establishment of Legal Aid Desk Committees across provincial prisons in July 2026** is a positive intervention.[65] If fully operational, these committees can help women obtain legal representation, pursue bail and challenge unnecessary detention. Their impact should be measured through published data showing how many women received assistance, secured bail or release, or were placed under a non-custodial measure.

KP's success in reducing its wider prison population should now extend to women. Effective legal assistance, consistent application of women-specific bail protections and greater use of non-custodial measures can prevent the recent increase from becoming an established trend.

65. "K-P Activates Legal Aid Desks for Destitutes, Women Prisoners," The Express Tribune, 1 August 2026, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2621556/k-p-activates-legal-aid-desks-for-destitutes-women-prisoners.

Figure 50. Women prisoners and trial status in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

4.8 Fewer Children in Prison but Almost All Are Under Trial

KP's juvenile prison population fell from 385 children in 2024 to **154** in 2026, a reduction of **60%**. This is a significant achievement and provides further evidence that the use of detention for children can be reduced.

KP has taken important steps towards implementing the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018. It has notified provincial rules under the Act, providing an operational framework for diversion and child-specific procedures.[66] Prison authorities also report that functioning District Legal Empowerment Committees have improved children's access to legal assistance.

Yet **145 of the 154 children in prison—94.2%—are awaiting trial**. The decline in the overall juvenile population therefore masks a continuing problem in its composition: almost every child who remains imprisoned has not been convicted.

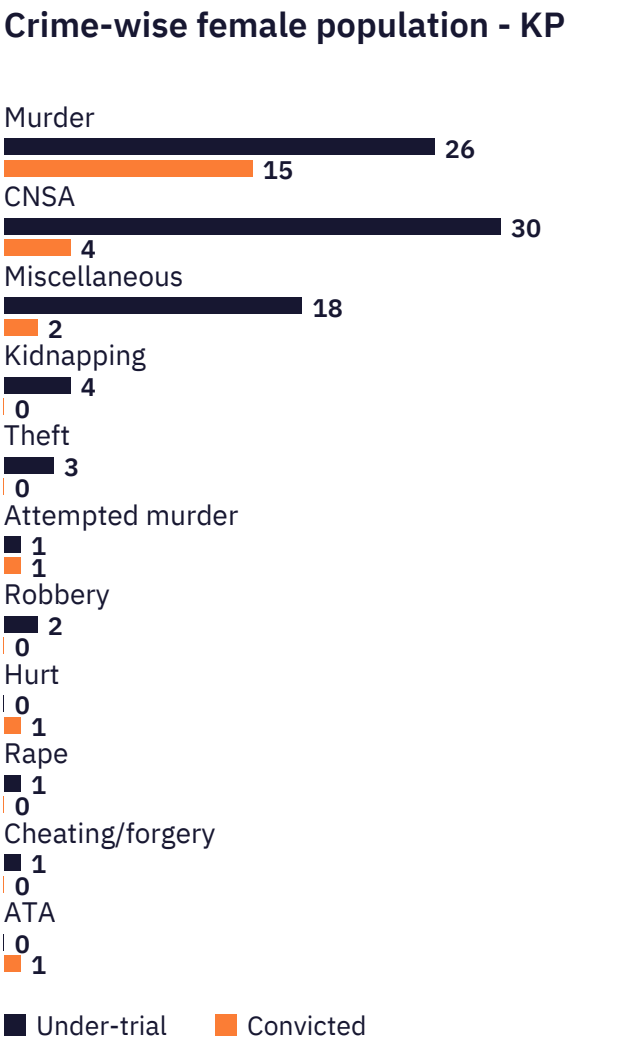


Figure 51. Offences of women prisoners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Murder is the largest recorded offence category, accounting for 58 children, or 37.7% of the juvenile population. It is followed by narcotics offences, involving 38 children, or 24.7%, and rape, involving 25 children, or 16.2%.

Pretrial detention dominates each of the largest categories. **F**ifty-two of the 58 children accused of murder and 36 of the 38 held under the CNSA are awaiting trial. The offence

66. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Juvenile Justice System Rules, https://www.scribd.com/document/825410828/Juvenile-Justice-System-Rules-2002

data therefore reflect patterns of arrest and detention more than juvenile convictions.

KP also has no dedicated juvenile prison. Children are held in sections of adult facilities, while girls are accommodated in female sections of adult prisons. This does not provide the specialised, age-appropriate environment required for their protection and rehabilitation.

Figure 52. Juvenile prisoners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KP should build on the reduction already achieved by implementing rules under JJSA, expanding diversion, ensuring early access to legal assistance and reviewing every child's eligibility for bail. The measure of success should not only be fewer children in prison, but fewer children entering detention in the first place and shorter periods of custody for those who do.

Under-trial juveniles - KP

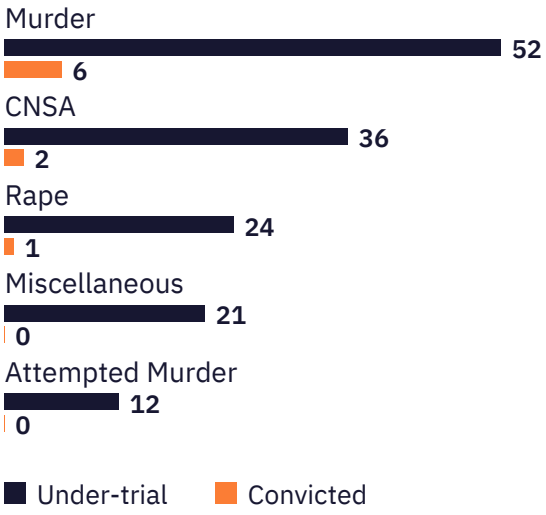


Figure 53. Trial status of juvenile prisoners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

4.9 Infrastructure, Healthcare and Sanitation

KP's province-wide capacity rate conceals significant pressure within individual prisons. Although the system as a whole operates at only 85.6% occupancy, **11 of its 33 prisons remain overcrowded**.

Healthcare presents a separate institutional challenge. Prison healthcare remains administratively under the prison system rather than the Health Department, although coordination takes place through MoUs and external referral arrangements. This arrangement raises concerns regarding compliance with the Nelson Mandela Rules, which require prison healthcare to be organised in close relationship with the general public health administration and healthcare professionals to operate with full clinical independence, with clinical decisions taken exclusively by healthcare

professionals.[67] KP's comparatively favourable provincial occupancy rate should therefore not be allowed to obscure conditions within individual facilities.

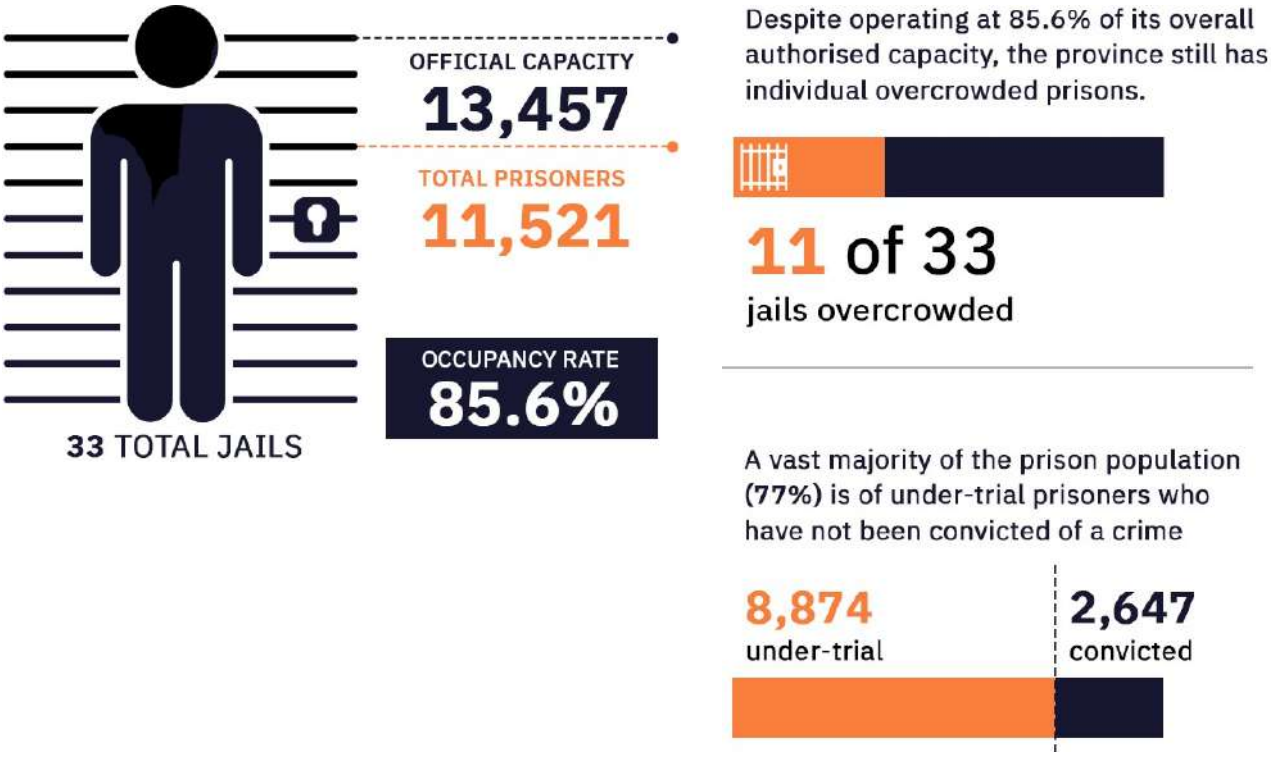


Figure 54. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prison estate, occupancy and trial status

KP demonstrates that prison overcrowding is not an inevitable consequence of population pressure and need not be addressed principally through construction. Its prison population has fallen by 13.8% since 2024, its under-trial population by 17%, and the province now operates at 85.6% of authorised capacity. These changes have coincided with extensive use of probation and other non-custodial mechanisms, implementation of juvenile diversion, and judicial case-review exercises capable of releasing large numbers of people detained for minor offences. The experience provides an important model for Punjab and Sindh: reducing admissions and actively facilitating appropriate releases can restore prison capacity rather than continually expanding the infrastructure required to accommodate rising incarceration.

At the same time, KP's progress remains uneven. More than three-quarters of prisoners remain under trial; almost 94% of imprisoned children are unconvicted; female imprisonment is rising against the provincial trend; and CNSA cases continue to generate a large, overwhelmingly under-trial population. **Sustaining KP's progress therefore requires moving beyond simply keeping the prison system below capacity towards reducing unnecessary detention itself**

67. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), UN General Assembly Resolution 70/175 (17 December 2015), Rules 24(2), 25(2) and 27(2). Rule 24(2) requires prison healthcare to be organised "in close relationship to the general public health administration"; Rule 25(2) requires healthcare professionals to act in full clinical independence; and Rule 27(2) provides that clinical decisions may only be taken by responsible healthcare professionals and may not be overruled or ignored by non-medical prison staff.

5. Balochistan

Balochistan at a glance

Balochistan is one of only two provincial prison systems in Pakistan currently operating within its overall authorised capacity, alongside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is particularly significant in the context of national prison growth: between 2024 and 2026, Balochistan's prison population **fell by 7.3%**, while its under-trial population declined by **20.4%**. Together with KP, Balochistan therefore stands apart from the overcrowding and rapid prison population growth seen in Punjab and Sindh. In 2026, its 12 prisons held **2,754** prisoners against an authorised capacity of 2,764. At **99.6%** occupancy, the province remains within its overall capacity—but by only 10 places.

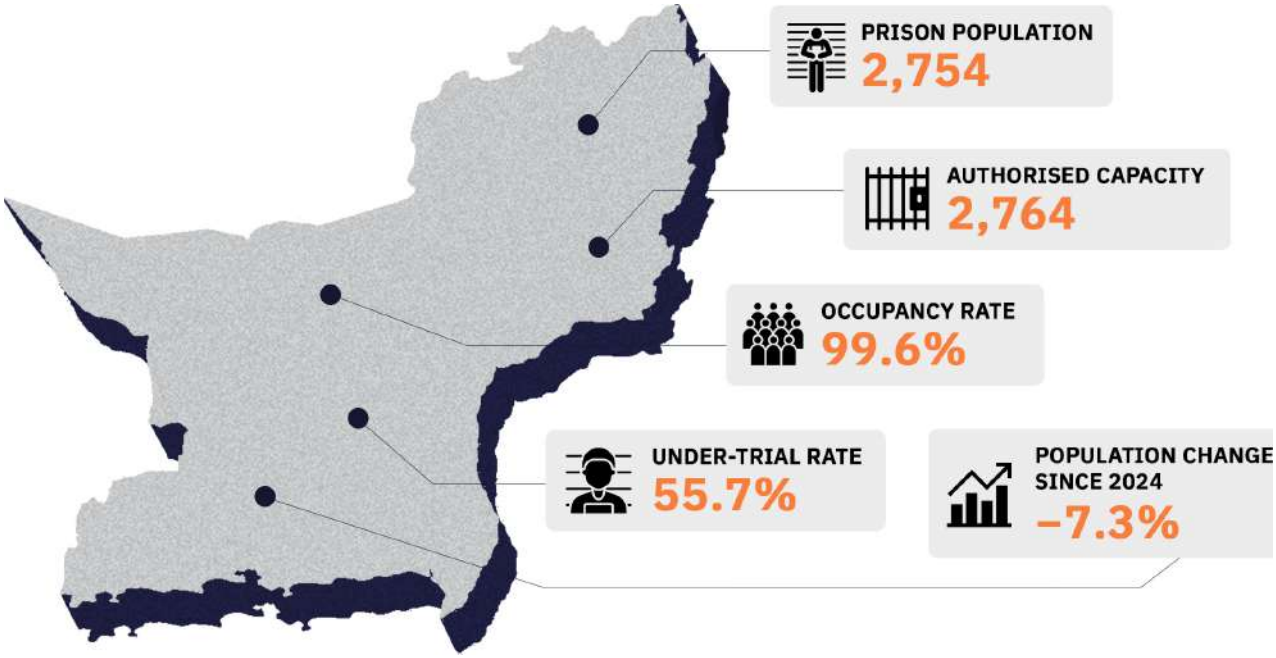


Figure 55. Balochistan prison population overview

However, **55.7%** of Balochistan's prisoners are still under-trial, and the decline has not benefited every group equally.

Women remain particularly affected by pretrial detention and punitive drug laws. Of the province's 37 imprisoned women, **35** are under-trial and 25 are detained under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act. Balochistan also holds **221 foreign nationals**, who account for 8% of its prison population. These prisoners may face additional barriers to legal representation, consular assistance and communication with their families.

Two major laws enacted in 2026—the **Balochistan Prisons and Prisoners Correctional Service Act** and the **Balochistan Probation and Parole Act**—provide an

important foundation for reform.^1 ^2 They were introduced during a wider restructuring of the province's criminal justice system, including the merger of the Balochistan Levies into the police. Their promise will now depend on implementation: the institutions established, the resources provided and the extent to which the new framework reduces unnecessary detention and improves conditions inside prisons.

Key observations

• Balochistan held **2,754 prisoners** against an authorised capacity of 2,764—an overall occupancy rate of **99.6%**.

• The prison population declined by **7.3% between 2024 and 2026**.

• The under-trial population fell by **20.4%**, from 1,928 to 1,535.

• Under-trial prisoners nevertheless constitute **55.7%** of the prison population.

• **35 of the 37 imprisoned women** are awaiting trial, while 25 are detained under the CNSA.

• The 2026 prison, probation and parole laws create a significant opportunity for reform, but must now be translated into functioning institutions and measurable results.

A Fragmented Criminal Justice System in Transition

Balochistan's prison figures must be understood within a criminal justice system shaped by geography, limited institutional reach and a long history of fragmented law enforcement.

Until 2026, the province was divided between "A" areas policed by the Balochistan Police and "B" areas administered by the Balochistan Levies. These parallel structures operated across Pakistan's largest and most sparsely populated province. In January 2026, the provincial government abolished this distinction and merged the Levies into the police, creating a unified policing structure.[68]

This transition could improve consistency in case registration, investigation and oversight. It also means that Balochistan's prison trends must be interpreted within a changing institutional context. The province's comparatively small prison population and lower under-trial rate are positive, but do not by themselves provide a complete measure of access to justice or the performance of the criminal justice system.

Vast distances, limited access to courts and legal assistance, and the historical operation of parallel enforcement structures all affect who enters the formal justice system and how cases progress. The coming years will show whether institutional unification results in more consistent policing, stronger safeguards and fairer access to justice across the province.

68. Abdullah Zehri, "Balochistan Abolishes 'B-Areas'; Merges Levies into Police," Dawn, 6 January 2026.

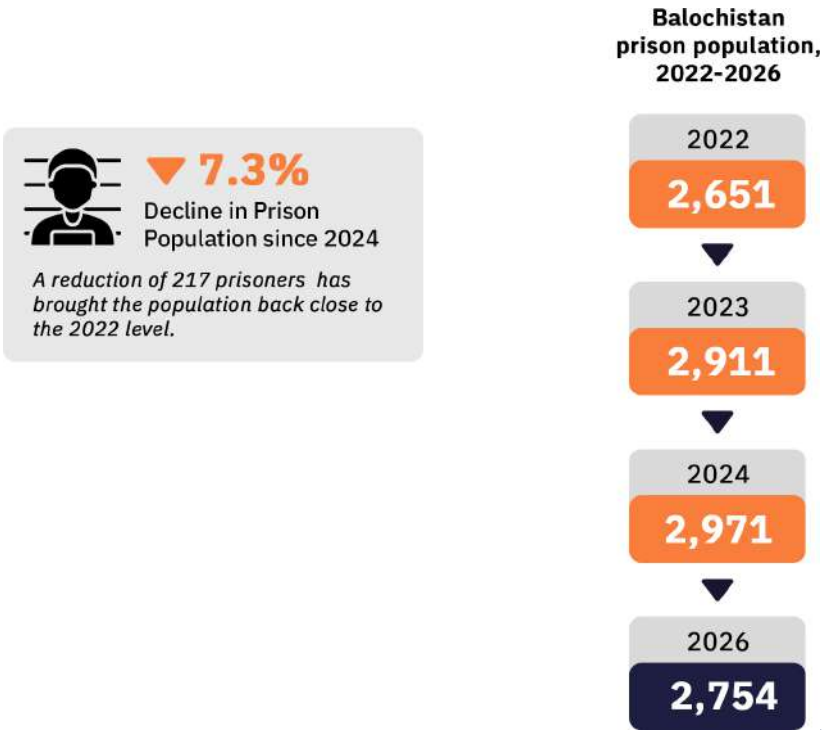


Figure 56. Decline in Balochistan's prison population

5.1 Decline Driven by Low Under-Trial Rate

Balochistan's prison population rose steadily from 2,651 in 2022 to 2,971 in 2024, before falling to **2,754 in 2026**. This represents a decline of **7.3% in two years** and places Balochistan, alongside KP, on a markedly different trajectory from Punjab and Sindh.

The decline was concentrated among people awaiting trial. Between 2024 and 2026, the number of under-trial prisoners fell from 1,928 to 1,535—a reduction of **393 people, or 20.4%**. Over the same period, the under-trial rate fell from **64.9% to 55.7%, a decline of 9.2 percentage points**, while the convicted population increased to 1,148.

This change is more significant than the fall in the overall prison population. Balochistan now has the lowest provincial under-trial rate in Pakistan, with approximately 1.3 under-trial prisoners for every convicted prisoner. At a time when under-trial detention is driving prison growth nationally, Balochistan is moving in the opposite direction.

Further progress will, nevertheless, require timely bail decisions, affordable sureties, access to legal assistance and faster case disposal. It must also reach the groups that have not benefited equally from the wider decline—particularly women and children.

Data Gap: Limited Offence Data Obscure the Drivers of Imprisonment

Balochistan has reduced both its overall and under-trial prison populations, but the available data does not show which offences account for this decline.

The absence of offence-wise breakdown prevents meaningful analysis of Balochistan's falling prison population. Without comparing admissions, releases and case outcomes by offence, the report cannot establish whether the decline resulted from changes in arrest practices, bail, acquittals, case disposal, transfers or reduced admissions.

Balochistan should publish annual prison data disaggregated by prison, offence, trial status, sex, age and nationality. The data should separately identify admissions, releases, bail decisions, acquittals, convictions, transfers and length of detention. Broad residual categories should be reduced and clearly defined.

Balochistan's decline in imprisonment is significant. Complete offence data is now crucial to explain what drove it, identify which measures are working and ensure that future reform is based on evidence rather than assumption.

Figure 57. Under-trial detention in Balochistan

5.2 Overall Capacity Masks Pressure Inside Individual Prisons

Balochistan is one of the only two provincial prison systems that is not overcrowded. Its prisons are operating at **99.6%** of their authorised capacity, leaving the entire provincial system 10 places below capacity. But this figure conceals an uneven distribution of prisoners. Four of the province's 12 prisons are overcrowded.

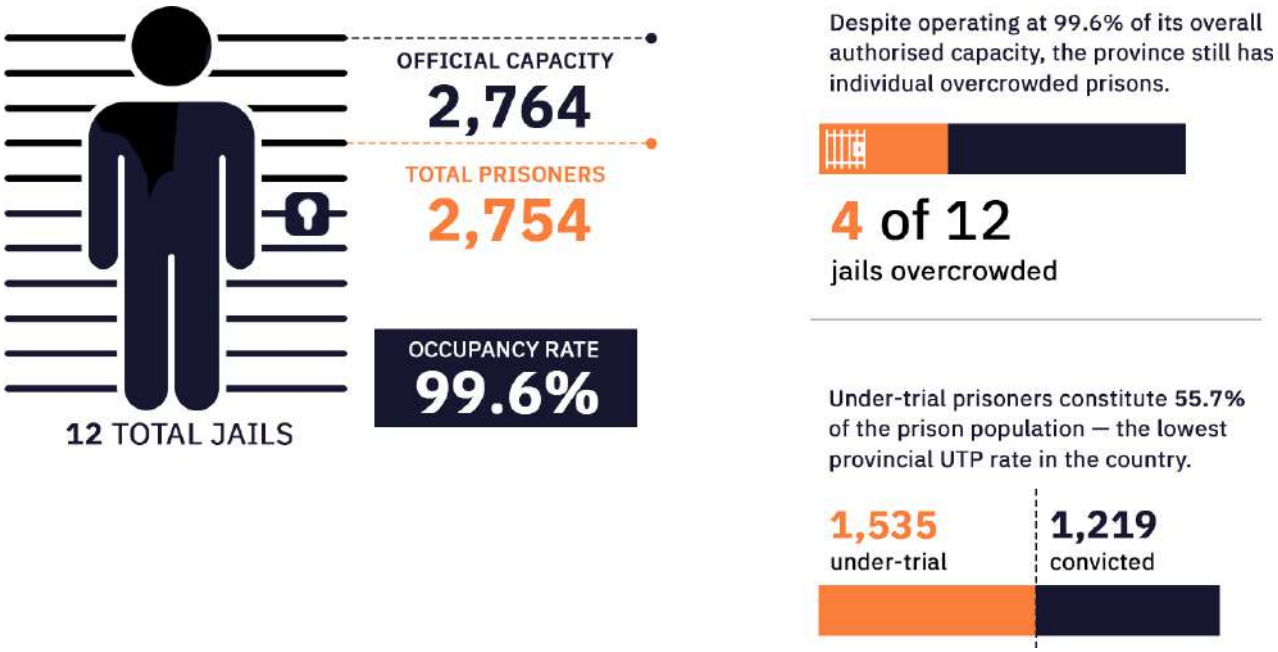


Figure 58. Balochistan prison capacity, overcrowding and trial status

The pressure is concentrated most heavily in District Prison Quetta and Central Prison Gaddani. District Prison Quetta holds 933 people in a facility designed for 472, placing it at 197.7% occupancy. Central Prison Gaddani holds 427 people against a capacity of 223, an occupancy rate of 191.5%. District Prison Noshki is also overcrowded, holding 197 people against a capacity of 150. District Prison D.M. Jamali is marginally above capacity, with 121 prisoners in space designed for 120.

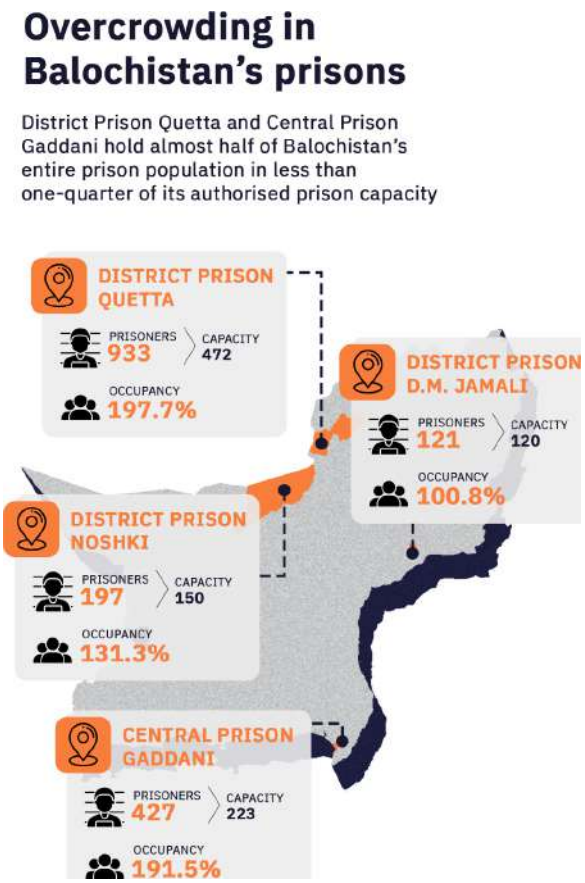


Figure 59. Overcrowded prisons in Balochistan

The figures show why provincial capacity alone is an inadequate measure of prison conditions. A prison system may remain technically within capacity while people in particular facilities face the same pressures produced by severe overcrowding elsewhere: inadequate living space, overstretched sanitation and healthcare, reduced access to rehabilitation and greater risks of illness, tension and violence.

5.3 Women Have Not Benefited Equally

Balochistan's female prison population fell from 44 women in 2024 to **37** in 2026. But this decline has not reduced women's exposure to pretrial detention. Thirty-five of the province's 37 imprisoned women—**94.6%**—are awaiting trial, compared with 55.7% of the prison population overall.

Narcotics offences are the principal driver of women's imprisonment. **Twenty-five women—67.6% of the entire female prison population—are detained under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act.** Approximately two out of every three women in Balochistan's prisons are therefore held in connection with a single area of criminal law.

The legal framework contains protections intended to prevent this outcome. Section 497 of the Code of Criminal Procedure allows courts to release women on bail even in cases falling within the prohibitory clause. It also provides additional protection where a woman has remained in custody without trial for the period specified by law.[69] The 2022 CNSA Amendment similarly retained exceptions allowing women and children convicted of drug offences to be considered for probation or parole.[70]

Figure 60. Women prisoners in Balochistan

These protections operate within a wider legal framework that continues to favour incarceration. The result is a system in which women may formally qualify for special consideration but still face substantial barriers to release.

Balochistan also has no dedicated women's prison. Women are held in separate sections of prisons designed principally for men. In a province covering more than 347,000 square kilometres, this may place them far from their children, families, lawyers and support networks. It also makes access to gender-specific healthcare, rehabilitation and reintegration services more difficult.

Every case involving a woman awaiting trial should be reviewed for bail, beginning with those held for prolonged periods and those accused of non-violent or lower-level drug offences. Courts should consider financial hardship, caring responsibilities, coercion, prior victimisation and the woman's alleged role in the offence.

69. Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, section 497(1), including the provisos relating to women and prolonged pretrial detention.
70. Control of Narcotic Substances (Amendment) Act, 2022, including the exceptions relating to probation and parole for women and juveniles.

5.4 Fifteen Children on Paper, Sixty-Three Observed in One Prison

Official data record only **15 children** across Balochistan's entire prison system, compared with eight in 2024. Nine of the 15 children are awaiting trial. These figures suggest that children constitute only a very small part of the province's prison population.

However, JPP's prison monitoring presents a sharply different picture. During an NCHR monitoring visit to Quetta District Jail, along with reputed child rights NGO Group Development Pakistan (GDP) in September 2025, 63 children were found in the jail, only one of whom was officially registered as a juvenile.

The monitoring identified serious weaknesses in age determination procedures. Prison authorities reportedly relied on physical appearance, facial hair and dental examination rather than examining birth certificates, educational records and other relevant documents. Section 8 of the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018 requires police to determine age from documentary evidence and to obtain a medical examination where such records are unavailable. It also requires a court to record a finding on age before authorising further detention where an accused person appears to be a child.[71]
Balochistan also lacks a dedicated, functioning borstal institution or Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre. This is despite the enactment of the Balochistan Borstal Institutions Act in 2014 and the later requirements of the Juvenile Justice System Act.[72] Children may consequently be held inside adult prison facilities without the specialised protection, education and rehabilitation required by law.

The province cannot protect children it does not identify. An immediate review should verify the age of every young person in custody, correct prison records and ensure that uncertainty is resolved in favour of treating the person as a child. Age determination must take place at the first point of contact with the police and be reviewed by the court before further detention is authorised.

Balochistan must also establish a functioning Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre and ensure that children receive legal assistance, bail and diversion wherever possible Until a dedicated facility is operational, every prison holding children must guarantee their complete separation from adults and provide appropriate education, healthcare, family contact and reintegration support.

Figure 61. Juvenile prisoners in Balochistan

71. Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, section 8.
72. Balochistan Borstal Institutions Act, 2014; Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, sections 5 and 20.

5.5 Foreign Nationals Form a Distinctive Prison Population

Balochistan holds **221 foreign nationals**, representing **8% of its entire prison population**. However, the available data do not identify prisoners' nationalities, alleged offences, trial status, length of detention or immigration status.

A joint policy brief by JPP and the National Commission for Human Rights found that foreign prisoners in Pakistan frequently lack adequate legal representation, interpretation and consular assistance. Many struggle to communicate directly with courts, understand legal proceedings or obtain evidence from their home countries for their defence.[73] The brief also identified the absence of a nationally binding consular-access policy, unclear institutional responsibilities and weak coordination between prisons, police, courts, diplomatic missions and government departments.

These barriers are particularly serious in Balochistan. Diplomatic missions are generally located far outside the province, while prisoners may be held hundreds of kilometres from courts, lawyers and administrative centres. Without interpretation and legal assistance from the earliest stage, a foreign national may be unable to understand the allegations, apply for bail, instruct a lawyer or participate effectively in proceedings.

International law provides clear safeguards. Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations requires that detained foreign nationals be informed without delay of their right to contact their consulate. Where consular assistance is requested, the relevant authorities must notify the consular post without delay.[74] The Nelson Mandela Rules require that foreign prisoners be given reasonable facilities to communicate with diplomatic and consular representatives.[75] The ICCPR also guarantees that an accused person must be informed of the charge in a language they understand and receive the free assistance of an interpreter where required.[76]

The new Balochistan Prisons Act provides an important legal framework for addressing these barriers. It expressly entitles every foreign national prisoner to communicate with and receive visits from the diplomatic or consular representatives of their country. More importantly, it places a positive duty on the Officer in-Charge to promptly notify the prisoner's embassy or consulate upon admission, unless the prisoner expressly requests otherwise in writing. The Act also provides for confidential communication with consular representatives and recognises their role in arranging legal representation, medical care and welfare assistance.

The priority in Balochistan should therefore be to ensure that these new statutory safeguards are implemented consistently in every prison. Implementation should also ensure that foreign prisoners can access interpretation and legal representation where required to participate effectively in criminal proceedings. Effective implementation will require coordination between prison authorities, courts, police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions, particularly given Balochistan's distance from most consular missions.

73. National Commission for Human Rights and Justice Project Pakistan, Protecting the Rights of Foreign Nationals Imprisoned in Pakistan (April 2024), https://www.jpp.org.pk/report/protecting-the-rights-of-foreign-nationals-imprisoned-in-pakistan/

74. Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963, article 36. https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/9_2_1963.pdf

75. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), rule 62. https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/175

76. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 14(3)(a) and (f).

Foreign nationals in Balochistan prisons

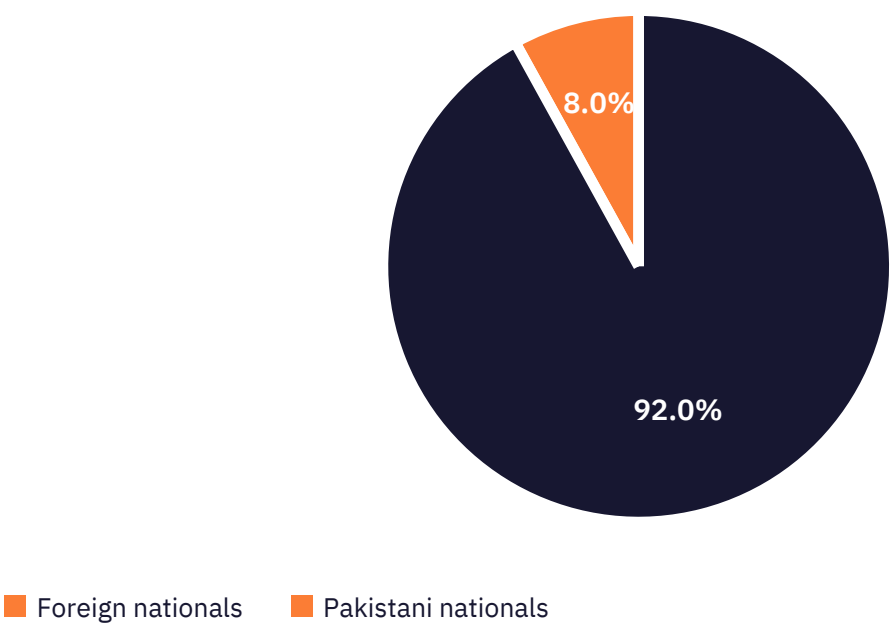


Figure 62. Foreign national prisoners in Balochistan

5.6 From New Laws to Functioning Institutions

Balochistan has taken important steps towards reforming its prison and criminal justice system. The **Balochistan Prisons and Prisoners Correctional Service Act 2026** provides a new legal framework for prison administration, while the **Balochistan Probation and Parole Act 2026** creates an opportunity to expand supervised alternatives to imprisonment. These laws signal a shift towards rehabilitation, reintegration and reduced reliance on incarceration.

Their impact, however, will depend on implementation. New laws do not reduce prison populations by themselves. The province must establish the institutions they require, appoint and train sufficient staff, adopt operational rules and procedures, allocate sustainable budgets and ensure that courts can identify and refer eligible people to probation and parole. The recruitment of staff for the Probation and Parole Department is a positive first step, but the new system must become accessible across Balochistan's widely dispersed districts.[77]

Expanded access to legal aid will be equally important. A planned legal-aid programme supported by the European Union and UNDP, involving the Legal Aid and Justice Authority and the Legal Aid Society, offers an

77. Government of Balochistan, Directorate of Public Relations, "Applications Invited from Candidates of Balochistan for Vacant Posts in the Probation and Parole Department, Balochistan," 14 June 2026. https://balochjobs.com/probation-and-parole-department-balochistan-jobs/

opportunity to expand legal assistance across Balochistan.[78] This is particularly significant in a province where distance, limited numbers of lawyers and weak institutional coverage can leave people without representation when arrest, bail and continued detention are decided.

The programme should prioritise prisoners who lack legal representation, cannot furnish surety or have not received timely bail and case review. It should also provide specialised assistance to women, children and foreign nationals, whose circumstances require additional legal and procedural safeguards.

Implementation should be measured through publicly reported outcomes. These should include the number of people granted probation or parole, legal-aid applications received and resolved, bail orders secured, prisoners released, districts served and average time spent in pretrial detention. The data should also show whether women, children, foreign nationals and people accused of minor or non-violent offences are benefiting.

Balochistan now has an opportunity to turn legislative reform into a functioning system that prevents unnecessary detention and supports reintegration. The test of these reforms will not be the number of laws enacted or programmes launched, but the number of people who receive legal assistance, obtain release and successfully return to their communities.

5.7 Infrastructure, Healthcare and Sanitation

Balochistan's geography shapes every aspect of prison administration. Its 12 prisons serve a vast and sparsely populated province, where long distances separate prisons from courts, hospitals, lawyers and prisoners' families. These distances make it harder to recruit staff, maintain supplies, arrange family visits and transfer seriously ill prisoners for specialist treatment.

The province's overall occupancy rate conceals severe pressure inside particular prisons. District Prison Quetta and Central Prison Gaddani are operating at almost twice their authorised capacity. In these facilities, overcrowding places additional strain on accommodation, kitchens, toilets, water supplies and healthcare. It also makes basic standards of hygiene and disease prevention harder to maintain.

Longstanding infrastructure concerns remain unresolved. In 2019, the Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee found that Central Prison Loralai and the district prisons in Killa Saifullah, Gwadar and Harnai were in urgent need of reconstruction and described their conditions as unfit for habitation.[79] More recent public data do not show whether these facilities have since been fully repaired or replaced.

78. European Union and United Nations Development Programme, programme documentation concerning the planned expansion of legal-aid services in Balochistan in collaboration with the Legal Aid and Justice Authority and the Legal Aid Society, 2026 (on file with Justice Project Pakistan).

79. Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee, First Report of the Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee (2019). See also Justice Project Pakistan, "Balochistan: Living with Nothing," Prison Reforms, https://jppprisonreforms.com/balochistan/.

Healthcare capacity is particularly limited. In 2023, ten of Balochistan's prisons reportedly had no doctor.[80] An earlier national review found that only four ambulances were available across the province's prison system.[81] Where treatment depends on referral to outside hospitals, shortages of doctors, ambulances and security staff can turn distance into a direct barrier to medical care.

The consequences became visible at District Prison Quetta in December 2024, when a serious outbreak of skin disease affected hundreds of prisoners. Reports linked its spread to overcrowding and inadequate prison conditions, while some severely affected prisoners required treatment at outside hospitals.[82] The outbreak shows how quickly failures in accommodation, sanitation and healthcare can become a wider health emergency inside a crowded prison.

Mental healthcare remains another major gap. JPP's earlier reporting identified more than 100 prisoners with mental-health conditions in Balochistan's prisons but found that no psychologists or psychiatrists were available to treat them.[83]

These gaps are especially dangerous in relation to communicable disease. Research at Central Prison Gaddani identified high levels of HIV and hepatitis and found that prisons lacked permanent systems for screening and managing tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis.[84] In overcrowded facilities, delayed diagnosis or interrupted treatment places prisoners, prison staff and surrounding communities at risk.

A province-wide health campaign in September 2025 demonstrated that coordinated intervention is possible. The Balochistan Health Department, TB Control Programme, Prisons Department and DoPasi Foundation screened 2,558 prisoners and 371 prison staff across all 12 prisons. The programme identified 11 confirmed cases of tuberculosis, eight cases of HIV, 61 cases of hepatitis B and 93 cases of hepatitis C. Those diagnosed with tuberculosis were linked immediately to treatment.[85]

This was an important achievement. But periodic screening cannot replace a permanent prison healthcare system. Every prison requires regular access to qualified medical staff, essential medicines, confidential testing, treatment and reliable referral arrangements. Screening should take place on admission and continue throughout detention, with uninterrupted treatment and follow-up after release.

The Nelson Mandela Rules require prisoners to receive healthcare of the same standard available in the community and place responsibility for organising prison healthcare on the State.[86] The Health Department should therefore assume a formal and continuing role in prison healthcare, with prison health services integrated into the provincial public-health system.

Balochistan should also publish prison-level information on medical staffing, ambulances, disease prevalence, water quality, sanitation and treatment outcomes. The province has shown that healthcare can reach all 12 prisons despite the distances involved. The priority now is to turn that intervention into a permanent system of care.

80. "No Doctor for Inmates in 10 Balochistan Prisons," The Express Tribune, July 2023, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2426566/no-doctor-for-inmates-in-10-balochistan-prisons.

81. Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee, First Report of the Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee (2019).

82. "Quetta Jail Inmates Afflicted by Skin Disease," The Express Tribune, 13 December 2024, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2515628/quetta-jail-inmates-afflicted-by-skin-disease.

83. Justice Project Pakistan, "Balochistan: Living with Nothing," Prison Reforms, drawing on the findings of the Prime Minister's Prisoners' Aid Committee, https://jpprisonreforms.com/balochistan/.

84. Ahmad Wali et al., "Prevalence of Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis in a Prison of Balochistan: A Cross-Sectional Survey," BMC Public Health, vol. 19, article 1631 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-8011-7.

85. "TB Cases on the Increase in Balochistan," Dawn, 10 December 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1960259.

86. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), Rules 24–27. See also Rules 13–18 on accommodation, water, sanitation and personal hygiene. https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/175

6. Recommendations

The recommendations below draw on the National Action Plan for Prison Reform, developed by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR). The Plan sets out two objectives, reducing overcrowding and improving conditions of treatment, with specific interventions assigned to the police, judiciary, executive, and legislature.

Objective 1: Reduce Overcrowding

1.1 CNSA Reform

Legislation

• Repeal or amend the 2022 CNSA Amendment to restore probation, remissions and parole

• Remove mandatory minimum punishments and adopt proportionate sentencing laws.

• Legally distinguish personal drug use from trafficking, with lower possession thresholds for small-scale cases treated as such.

• Develop diversion for low-level and non-violent drug offences. Instead of imprisonment, eligible defendants, particularly people who use drugs and low-level actors, should be diverted to appropriate treatment, rehabilitation, probation or other community-based measures.

• Reform the CNSA to provide diversion measures and alternatives to imprisonment, in line with the Bangkok Rules and the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy.

Judiciary

• Commute or revise the death sentences of all 7 individuals currently facing the death penalty under the CNSA.

• Introduce mandatory training for the judiciary through the Federal and Provincial Judicial Academies, on the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy.

• Develop sentencing guidelines to promote proportionate sentencing, ensure consistency in punishment, and distinguish between personal use and trafficking.

• Waive surety bonds for women and children held in custody on drug offences.

• Establish clear protocols that take into account gender-sensitive mitigating circumstances, including history of trauma or partner violence, coercion, caretaking responsibilities and drug dependence.

Executive

• Establish rehabilitation centres for voluntary treatment.

• Expand harm-reduction coverage, needle and syringe programmes, opioid agonist therapy, including inside prisons.

• Provide specialised prison health services for women substance users, accounting for prior victimisation and the needs of pregnant women and women with children.

• Launch evidence-based stigma-reduction campaigns targeting the public, healthcare workers, and law enforcement.

Police

• Reprioritise policing toward large-scale traffickers and network dismantling, away from small-scale users and low-level actors.

• Require police officers to wear body-worn cameras during arrests and the collection and handling of evidence in drug cases, to strengthen procedural safeguards and reduce wrongful detention.

1.2 Decriminalisation of Poverty and Status

Legislation

• Amend Section 53 of the Pakistan Penal Code to include community service as a sentencing option.

• Conduct a comprehensive review of all laws criminalising conduct arising from poverty, homelessness, or status, including begging, vagrancy, encroachment, informal vending, and offences defined by a person's economic or social status, with a view to repeal or substantial amendment.

Judiciary

• Prioritize bail decisions for undertrial prisoners held in detention for lengthy periods, especially for non-payments of surety bond and/or fine.

• Weigh an individual's economic circumstances when assessing whether a fine is disproportionate to the offence.

• Mandate social investigation and probation assessment reports for children before any detention decision.

• Eliminate sureties and financial bail for juveniles, to prevent detention based solely on inability to pay.

• Refer all women and juveniles without legal representation to the Legal Aid and Justice Authority.

• Adopt a clear policy that incarceration of women with dependent minors is used only as a last resort.

• Release individuals serving sentences solely for inability to fulfil a contractual obligation.

Executive

• Expand provincial probation and parole services by equipping them with adequate human and financial resources to address the needs of the prison populations.

• Establish fully functional Juvenile Justice Committees in every district, with trained staff and logistical support as required under Section 10 of the Juvenile Justice System Act.

• Track and publish disaggregated data on imprisonment for poverty-related charges, by offence and income profile.

• Partner with social services and NGOs to route people into support services rather than detention for poverty-related conduct.

Police

• Issue standing instructions against arrests for petty, non-violent, poverty-related offences.

• Inform every arrested person of legal aid availability through the Legal Aid and Justice Authority at the point of arrest.

• Implement police-station-level diversion for juveniles, people with addiction, people with mental illness, and petty offenders.

1.3 General Reform

Legislation

• Establish specialised Prison Tribunals to function as a one-stop forum for addressing prisoner grievances.

• Legislate clear statutory obligations to implement alternatives to detention for women, juveniles, people with psychosocial disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

• Amend law so pretrial detention cannot exceed the likely sentence for the alleged offence.

Judiciary

• Establish legal provisions for periodic judicial review of life sentences, including those without parole.

Executive

• Replicate KP's Dispute Resolution Committee model in all provinces.

• Invest in the infrastructure and services required for community service schemes, probation, and restorative justice programmes.

• Track and publish comparative statistics on average pretrial detention time versus expected sentence length, to identify excessive pretrial detention.

• Train public officials on alternatives to detention and run public education campaigns countering the assumption that public safety requires harsher punishment.

• Integrate prison reform explicitly into national sustainable development planning, linking it to health, poverty reduction, and social protection strategy.

Objective 2: Improving Treatment in Prisons

2.1 Prison Tribunals

Legislation

• Establish specialised Prison Tribunals as a one-stop forum for prisoner grievances.

• Legislate clear Tribunal powers: authority to investigate complaints of mistreatment, summon officials and documents, and issue binding directions to prison authorities.

• Operationalise quasi-judicial Ombudsperson offices within the prison system to provide swift, low-barrier redress and complement Prison Tribunals.

Judiciary

• Implement a mobile court model, appointed by the Chief Justice, to review cases of prisoners who have overstayed their sentence or remained undecided for extended periods.

• Deploy interim judicial oversight (special commissions, regular reporting orders) to monitor prison conditions until Tribunals are formally established.

Executive

• Use existing authority under Section 59 of the Prisons Act, 1894 to establish interim Prison Complaints Committees or Grievance Redress Cells.

• Once Tribunals exist, train prison authorities and staff on compliance with their directions.

Prison administration

• Begin monthly data reporting on categories and frequency of grievances, using dedicated Project Management Information Systems to generate analytics for oversight bodies.

• Train staff on human rights standards and fair treatment principles.

2.2 Torture and Ill-Treatment

Legislation

• Amend the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act, 2022 to explicitly cover psychological suffering and non-physical torture, including prolonged solitary confinement.

• Remove the "malafide complaints" offence from the 2022 Act, which currently discourages genuine reporting.

Executive

• Notify and operationalise rules under the 2022 Act, specifying complaint procedures, timelines, and oversight.

• Run national awareness campaigns for prisoners and staff on rights under the 2022 Act and safe reporting of torture complaints.

• Track and publish national data on torture allegations, investigations, and outcomes, disaggregated by prison, gender, and age.

• Make the NCHR's torture-prevention e-course mandatory in all police training academy curricula.[87]

Prison administration

• Develop internal SOPs prohibiting torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, incorporating non-coercive interrogation standards (Méndez Principles) and mandatory reporting of complaints.

• Guarantee immediate, confidential medical examination for any prisoner alleging torture, in line with the Istanbul Protocol.

• Mandate staff training on lawful disciplinary practice and prisoners' rights under the mandate of the 2022 Act.

87. Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) and National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), Prevention of Torture: Training Manual for Public Officials (2025), accompanied by an e-course available at:https://e-course.jpp.org.pk/login/?redirect_to=https%3A%2F%2Fe-course.jpp.org.pk%2F

2.3 Updating the Prison Legal Framework

Legislation

• Update Prison Rules in every province to align with the Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules, and UN Common Position on Incarceration, including dedicated chapters on prison psychologists, women, children, and foreign prisoners.

Executive

• Train prison officials nationwide on international standards for prisoner treatment.

• Conduct regular training of Warders, Head Warders, Chief Warders and ministerial staff on international and domestic best practices for prison management, ensuring standardised professional development across all provinces.

2.4 Mental Health

Legislation

• Enact legislation to implement the Supreme Court's directives under the landmark *Safia Bano* judgment.[88]

Executive

• Establish psychiatric facilities for prisoners with psychosocial disabilities, consistent with the *Safia Bano* judgment.

• Assign mental health professionals from provincial health departments to serve prisoners in every province.

• Mandate mental health training for prison officials.

Prison administration

• Establish formal referral pathways diverting mentally ill individuals to psychiatric hospitals rather than prison, under provincial Mental Health Acts.

• Conduct mental health screening for every prisoner on admission, with findings shared with the prisoner's legal counsel.

88. PLD 2021 SC 488.

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