6.1.3. Individuals perceived as transgressing religious and moral codes

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○ (a) Conversion

Conversion in Pakistan is mainly reported in the context of forced conversion to Islam of girls and women, as well as men from religious minorities, often under threat of death.1471 This differs from apostasy, which involves abandoning or renouncing one's faith in Islam.1472 For more information, see section (b) Apostasy.

In Pakistan, women and girls from religious minority groups are vulnerable to forced conversion, with the phenomenon primarily affecting Hindu and Christian women and girls, who are forced to convert through marriage by Muslim captors.1473 They also face threats of violence, and social pressure in this context.1474 Factors such as poverty, limited access to education, low socio-economic status, and cultural stigma are additional barriers for their access to effective protection, including legal protection, while fear of retaliation further prevents families and communities from speaking out.1475 According to Zia Ur Rehman, a Pakistan-based journalist, in an interview with the EUAA on 18 March 2026, 'Hindus and Christians who convert to Islam for various social, economic, or personal reasons but later attempt to return to their previous faith may face significant social pressure, threats, or legal complications, for instance, in two cases involving Christians in Karachi who fled from Punjab due to fear and insecurity and are now living discreetly in Karachi's densely populated Christian neighbourhoods'.1476 Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of drafting this report.

The National Commission for Human Rights in Pakistan describes eight types of conversions in Pakistan, including wilful (when an individual freely chooses to convert to another religion), for shelter (when vulnerable individuals, particularly women and girls, seek protection from poverty, violence, or other difficult circumstances and

convert as a means of survival), induced (when individuals are persuaded to convert through promises of financial stability, marriage, or other incentives), fraudulent (when conversion occurs through deception or false promises about the nature of marriage or conversion), out of greed (when perpetrators seek material gain such as access to the individual's property, inheritance, or dowry), exploitative (when individuals' vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of education, or social marginalisation are used to pressure them into conversion), under threat or duress (when physical or emotional threats, including harm to the individual or their family, compel conversion), and forceful (when conversion occurs through overt physical or psychological coercion, violence, or severe intimidation).1477

Men from religious minority communities are also pressured to convert to Islam, including threats of death or coercion as well as inducements such as debt forgiveness, land donations, employment opportunities and societal acceptance. In some cases, individuals are threatened with death if they refuse conversion.1478 In some interpretations of Islam, the recitation of the *shahada* (Kalima in Urdu or declaration of faith) by a non-Muslim is considered sufficient to establish conversion to Islam, regardless of personal belief or coercive circumstances, and once an individual is regarded as Muslim under this view, any subsequent return to their original faith can be treated as apostasy.1479 For more information, see section (b) Apostasy.

In 2024 and 2025, several non-Muslim minor girls, mainly Hindus in Sindh, went missing and were reportedly subjected to forced conversion, with some returning days later after being forcibly married to Muslim men.1480 When conversion to Islam by a non-Muslim is carried out in a court, a conversion certificate for marriage is issued by the religious authority as a proof of new faith.1481

According to Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) data published in April 2025, 83 cases of abduction were recorded in Pakistan in 2024, including 52 Hindus (63 %) and 31 Christians (37 %). Of these, 68 cases involved abduction combined with forced conversion, while 15 involved abductions.1482 49 victims (59 %) were between 14 and 18 years, 12 (15 %) were below 14 years, 12 (14 %) were above 18 years, 8 (10 %) were of unknown age.1483

Between January and June 2025, several cases of forced conversion of minors from minority groups were reported across Pakistan including Balochistan,1484 KP1485 Punjab,1486 and in Sindh where three Hindu sisters and their male cousin, including two minors, were forcibly converted to Islam1487 and days later a video appeared online showing them reciting Islamic prayers under new names.1488 In January and February 2026, at least 23 cases of abduction, forced conversion, or forced marriage of minority group girls were documented across Pakistan, including both Christian and Hindu victims.1489 On 3 February 2026, Pakistan's Federal Constitutional Court in Lahore (capital of Punjab province) granted custody of a 13-year-old Christian girl, who

was allegedly abducted on 29 July 2025 and forcefully converted and married, to a 30-year-old Muslim man, rejecting her parents' age documentation and declaring the marriage valid.1490

○ (b) Apostasy

The act of abandoning or renouncing one's faith in Islam is referred to as apostasy1491 (also known as *Ridda* in Arabic), and the term *murtad* refers to a Muslim who allegedly left Islam.1492

Apostasy is widely viewed in Pakistan through a strong religious and social lens, in a country where Islam plays a central role in national identity and public morality, and is often perceived by conservative religious segments as a serious moral and communal transgression rather than merely a matter of personal belief.1493 Apostasy is punishable by death in most schools of Islamic jurisprudence.1494 While apostasy is not mentioned in the Pakistani Penal Code,1495 it 'can lead to prosecution under Pakistan's blasphemy laws,'1496 which addresses acts deemed offensive to religious sentiments and carries penalties of up to 10 years of imprisonment.1497 Apostasy can be also punished by death under *hadd* crimes according to the Sharia law.1498 According to the Enforcement of the Sharia Act of 1991, Sharia is the supreme law of Pakistan, and all laws of the country must be interpreted in the light of Sharia.1499 For information on Blasphemy, see sections 5.4. Blasphemy law and below (d) Individuals accused of blasphemy.

○ (c) Atheism

Atheism, which is known as *ilḥād* in Urdu,1500 refers to 'the denial of the existence of God', and in classical religious terminology issued by the Darul Ifta of Jamia Farooqia, a seminary in Karachi, categorises an atheist as *mulhid* (denier of faith) or *dahri* (materialist), while individuals who renounce Islam after previously adhering to it are labelled *murtad* (apostates).1501 These classifications significantly influence both societal attitudes and legal interpretations.1502

Within the Islamic theological context that is predominant in Pakistan[1503] both constitutionally and ideologically,[1504] the rejection of *ʿilm al-kalām* or the denial of the existence of God constitutes *kufr* (disbelief) when it involves a deliberate and conscious denial (*inkār*) of established theological truths,[1505] and *kufr* is considered as the most serious religious transgression.[1506]

Atheism exists within a highly sensitive and complex framework shaped by theology, law, and deeply rooted social norms,[1507] and the country has seen a growing visibility of scepticism, atheism and agnosticism, particularly among urban, educated youth, most noticeably in universities and digital and social-media spaces where religious taboos are increasingly questioned.[1508]

According to a Gallup International survey released in July 2025, Pakistan ranks first among the top five most religious nations in the world, with 94 % of Pakistanis identified as religious, while only about 1 % described themselves as convinced atheists and 3 % as not religious.[1509]

According to Zia, 'although atheism is not explicitly criminalised under Pakistani statutory law, its expression often intersects with the country's stringent blasphemy laws'.[1510] In practice, statements perceived as denying or challenging core religious beliefs can be prosecuted under these laws, which carry severe penalties, including the death sentence.[1511] A notable example is the 2017 case involving several bloggers who were reportedly abducted and later accused of disseminating blasphemous content online.[1512]

Zia noted that 'socially, atheists in Pakistan often face stigmatisation and are frequently perceived as apostates or as individuals acting against societal and religious values'.[1513] According to Nida Aly, Executive Director of the Asma Jahangir Legal Aid Cell (AGHS), interviewed by EUAA on 7 May 2026, 'Open identification as an atheist is uncommon in the country, and many individuals therefore conceal their atheistic views. Discourse on atheism, whether online or offline, is restricted and may expose individuals to verbal threats or physical violence where such discourse or expression is considered blasphemous, even where no such intent exists.'[1514]

While atheism is largely practiced and promoted in digital spaces in Pakistan,[1515] the expansion of cybercrime legislation has further intensified the risks associated with expressing dissenting or non-religious views online. Content shared online, even within private forums, may be deemed blasphemous, making digital expression particularly hazardous. High-profile cases, such as individuals prosecuted for alleged blasphemy on social media, underscore the seriousness with which such matters are treated.[1516] Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of drafting this report.

○ (d) Individuals accused of blasphemy

Human Rights Watch points at Pakistan's blasphemy laws as discriminatory, denying equality before the law and enabling violence; the laws have been used for personal vendettas and against minority religious communities, and in the past decade dozens of people were killed in mob violence following blasphemy accusations.1517 The blasphemy law has allegedly been used to settle personal disputes.1518 For information on criminalisation of Blasphemy in Pakistan, see section 5.4. Blasphemy law and for further background information on individuals accused of blasphemy, see section 6.3 of the EUAA COI report Pakistan - Country Focus (December 2024).

According to Zia, 'blasphemy laws prescribe severe penalties and accused individuals can, in principle, seek police protection, but in practice state protection is often inconsistent once allegations become public, as law-enforcement officials and judges have at times shown reluctance to handle such cases due to fears of public backlash and security risks.'1519 Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of drafting this report.

According to the latest data published in April 2025 by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a total of 344 individuals were accused of blasphemy, the majority of whom were Muslim (242 individuals, 70 %), followed by Ahmadis (49 individuals, 14 %), Hindus (32 individuals, 9 %), and Christians (20 individuals, 6 %).1520 The source further noted that blasphemy accusations were mostly concentrated in Punjab, which accounted for 213 individuals (62 %), followed by Sindh with 102 individuals (30 %), while significantly fewer cases were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (17 individuals, 5 %), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (8 individuals, 2 %), Gilgit-Baltistan (3 individuals, 1 %), and Balochistan (1 individual, less than 1 %).1521

According to the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) report of 27 February 2026, those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan are sentenced to death by hanging, although the penalty has not been carried out, and individuals accused often spend years on death row. 1522 Zia stated that 'non-state actors frequently take matters into their own hands and mob violence linked to blasphemy accusations has occurred repeatedly.'1523 Meanwhile, authorities fail to prevent mob violence and intimidation by fundamentalist individuals and organisations targeting the accused, their families, and communities, including through courtroom pressure on judges, with lawyers often involved and reportedly paid by these groups, contributing to rare acquittals at trial level.1524 Zia indicated that 'accused individuals and their families often experience harassment, displacement, or economic boycotts.'1525

In this context of violence and mobilisation around blasphemy allegations, Zia identified two types of *fatwas* (non-binding religious opinion issued by an Islamic scholar) in Pakistan: 'mobilising' *fatwas*, used to rally communities around social or political objectives, and 'punitive' *fatwas*, which endorse punishment or violence.1526 Zia noted that 'such pronouncements are often informal and disseminated through sermons and digital messaging, including by clerics and groups such as TLP, allowing allegations to spread rapidly, trigger public mobilisation prior to formal investigations, and in some cases contribute to incitement to violence, while accountability for such actions remains limited'.1527 Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of drafting this report.

According to the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), a network referred to as the 'blasphemy business' is involved in the entrapment of young people on blasphemy charges,1528 particularly individuals from marginalised religious groups or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who are often targeted and pressured into paying intermediaries in an attempt to avoid prosecution or reach informal settlements.1529 This contributes to a significant increase in registered cases, most initiated by the FIA's cybercrime unit, frequently in 'collaboration with a private entity.' In these cases, 'due process was notably disregarded', arrests were often carried out by 'private individuals' rather than law enforcement agencies, reports documented 'torture both during apprehension and immediately afterward', detainees' statements were obtained 'under duress, compromising the legitimacy of their content', legal aid was 'systematically obstructed and, in some instances, actively threatened'.1530

By August 2025, hundreds of people in Pakistan remained imprisoned on blasphemy charges, with some cases stemming from online entrapment by individuals seeking to extort victims or provoke arrests.1531

In January 2025, a court in Pakistan reportedly sentenced four persons to death for blasphemy after they have allegedly posted 'sacrilegious materials' on social media about Islamic religious figures and Quran.1532 Zia noted that 'private groups and volunteers often monitor social media to identify alleged offenders'.1533 Human Rights Watch reported that in 2025 there has been an increase in blasphemy-related attacks in the country.1534 By June 2025, a fabricated blasphemy case against a Pakistani national living abroad prevented him from returning to Pakistan, while his brother was already imprisoned on the same charges.1535 According to a 26 February 2026 report by Human Rights Watch, Pakistan's blasphemy laws, particularly Section 295-C of the penal code, effectively carry a mandatory death sentence; although no executions have been carried out, several individuals remain on death row, dozens are serving life sentences, and hundreds have been charged under these laws over the past three decades.1536 In December 2025, a court in Lahore, Punjab province, overruled a *fatwa* issued against a religious scholar based on a social-media video, noting that the validity and authority of such religious decrees, especially from bodies like the Punjab

Quran Board, are for the trial court to examine and do not take precedence over the legal process in blasphemy cases.1537

○ (e) Interfaith marriage

In Pakistan, interfaith marriage is regulated under specific laws including1538 the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961,1539 the Christian Marriage Act of 1872,1540 the Hindu Marriage Act of 2017,1541 the Punjab Anand Karaj Act of 2017 that regulates Sikh marriages,1542 and the Special Marriage Act of 1872,1543 which permits inter-religious marriage registration for couples who do not follow the same faith.1544

Despite legal provisions, interfaith marriage frequently faces challenges including social stigma, often resulting in family disputes, legal delays, and religious restrictions, where some religious communities restrain mixt marriage.1545 While a Muslim man in Pakistan can marry a Christian or Jewish woman, Muslim women encounter restrictions in interfaith marriages.1546 According to an AsiaNews report of 31 March 2026, Pakistan's Federal Constitutional Court in Lahore upheld the marriage between a Muslim man and a 13-year-old Christian girl, recognising her conversion to Islam and rejecting her father's petition for her release. 1547 According to the Pakistani law, marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim person is allowed if the non-Muslim partner accepts and converts to Islam voluntarily.1548 For information on forced conversion of persons from religious minorities in Pakistan, see section (a) Conversion.

○ (f) Consumption of alcohol

Consumption of alcohol by Muslims is prohibited and punished under the Pakistan law. 1549 The Prohibition (Enforcement of *Hadd*) Order, 1979, stipulates that 'whoever being an adult Muslim takes intoxicating liquor by mouth is guilty of drinking liable to "hadd" and shall be punished with whipping numbering eighty stripes'.1550 For information on *hadd* (plural *hudud*) punishments, see section 5.5 of the EUAA COI report Pakistan - Country Focus (December 2024).

Proof for *hadd* punishment requires either a confession by the accused or testimony from at least two adult male Muslim witnesses.1551 Under the Pakistan Penal Code, appearing drunk in public is also a punishable offense.1552 The punishment includes

imprisonment for up to seven days, with a minimum detention of 24 hours.1553 Alcohol is considered *haram* (forbidden) in Islam and described as an 'intoxicants' and the 'work of Satan'.1554 Although there is a complete legal prohibition on alcohol consumption for Muslims,1555 it is still consumed in Pakistan.1556 Muslims often obtain alcohol through bootlegging networks and informal liquor shops, particularly in the southern province of Sindh.1557

Non-Muslims are legally permitted limited access to alcohol1558 including Hindus and Christians, who may purchase restricted quantities with official permits.1559 As of 8 August 2025, five hotels in Islamabad were legally licensed to sell alcohol to non-Muslim foreigners,1560 and in January 2026, authorities also lifted a ban on a Pakistani brewery allowing it to export beer.1561

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