

[EU 2018 Annual Report on Human Rights and Democratisation - Country Updates on Human Rights and Democracy 2017](#)

See caste-related passages highlighted

Pakistan

In 2017, some progress has been noted in the field of Democracy and Human Rights in Pakistan, for example the passing of the Electoral Reform Bill, the development of the Treaty Implementation Cells at Provincial level, a more active role of Parliament and the Ministry of Human Rights (including a new Minister and Secretary), Government efforts on implementation of the National Action Plan on Human Rights and increasingly independent oversight bodies (the National Commission of Human Rights and the Commission of the Status of Women). There have also been developments in legislation on the rights of women and children, most notably on violence against women (anti-rape and anti-honour killing laws) and establishment of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child.

However, effective implementation continues to be a concern and widespread incidents of violence against women, girls and transgender people continued to be reported in 2017. There are serious concerns as regards the shrinking space for civil society as manifested by restrictions imposed on INGOs, including through registration and the signature of MoUs, prompting some to close their operations in Pakistan, while others are appealing a refusal to be registered. Restrictions on freedom of expression, through enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and persecution of human rights defenders and journalists, government's inability to combat religious intolerance, human rights abuses in the wake of Counter-Terrorism operations, as well blasphemy-related cases and discrimination of minorities were also reported. A total of 44 people were executed in 2017 (as compared to 87 in 2017) and the military courts' jurisdiction over civilians was extended for a period of two more years.

The key EU's priorities in 2017 were: a) Freedom of Religion or Belief b) Women's rights and gender equality c) Death Penalty d) Rule of Law and Access to Justice e) Freedom of Expression.

The GSP+ scheme has contributed to an increased focus on human rights by the Government, in its legislative and policy efforts and in the public debate. In general, progress has been made on the legislative side, but effective implementation remains elusive. Beyond legislation and treaty body reporting, adjustments are needed to ensure that domestic legislation is compatible with treaty obligations, including strengthening of relevant human rights institutions and reforming the neglected criminal justice system. In December 2017, the mid-term review of GSP+ to Pakistan took place. The Biennial GSP+ Report was issued on 19 January. The EU Delegation and EU MS took part during the year in numerous public diplomacy initiatives to promote Human Rights, also relayed on social media and in the local press, generating widespread debate on human rights.

The 8th meeting of EU-Pakistan Joint Commission and Subgroup on Governance and Human Rights, which took place in October 2017, provided an opportunity to discuss the human rights situation and both sides noted challenges that required continued attention. The EU side acknowledged efforts made in accordance with the Human Rights Plan of Action adopted by the Government of Pakistan in 2016 and the strengthening of human rights institutions. The EU reiterated its concerns in several areas of protection for human rights, inter alia the application of the death penalty and the blasphemy laws, freedom of religion or belief and the freedom of expression. Jan Figel, Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union, visited Pakistan for the first time from 10 to 16 December 2017. The visit of the Special Envoy provided opportunities to pass

messages on FoRB, and to discuss the prospects for enhancing EU-Pakistan exchanges on interfaith harmony and reform in the religious domain.

Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law is the third focal sector in the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020. In December 2017, Pakistan and the European Union signed a Financing Agreement under the AAP 2016 on the Promotion of Human Rights in Pakistan for a total amount of 9.6 million Euros. The agreement will provide technical assistance to the Government of Pakistan at federal and provincial level as well as the Independent Human Rights Institutions.

The EU in addition supported in 2017 under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) eleven Civil Society Organisations with an overall budget of 5.5 million Euros in Human Rights projects in line with the thematic priorities of the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy.

In 2017, Pakistan faced three UN Treaty Body Reviews. In April 2017 the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) reviewed Pakistan for its compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment, for the first-time since Pakistan signed and ratified the Convention in 2008 and 2010 respectively. In July, 2017 Pakistan was reviewed by the United Nations Human Rights Committee for its compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). On 16 October 2017, the UN General Assembly elected Pakistan to serve on the Human Rights Council as of 1 January 2018. Pakistan underwent its 3rd Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 13 November 2017, where 117 delegations took the floor raising concerns relating to, inter alia, the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of opinion and expression and issues of discrimination and violence against women and minorities. Pakistan received 289 recommendations to which it should respond by March 2018.

The shrinking space for civil society, restrictions on freedom of expression, the situation of minorities and vulnerable persons are the main challenges. Twenty-one INGOs received in November 2017 a rejection letter requesting them to leave the country. These INGOs have been given the possibility to appeal this decision. Pakistan has to step up its efforts and take more proactive, sustained and forceful action to address problematic areas, such as on torture and enforced disappearances/extra judicial killings, the use of the blasphemy laws and the death penalty. In this context, it is important that Pakistan follows-up on the recommendations provided by the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies.