

Pakistan's GSP Plus Status and Human Rights Compliance (2014-2024)

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Abstract

Pakistan is the biggest beneficiary of the European Union Generalized scheme of preferences plus (GSP+) since January 2014 and had received a duty-free treatment of more than 85 percent of its exports- most of which are textiles- to the EU, the second largest trading partner. This has led to massive economic benefits, export to the EU increased 108 percent between 2014-2022 to EUR9.0 billion, which underpins millions in labor-intensive industries. But GSP+ conditionality demands the ratification and successful observance of 27 fundamental international human rights, labor rights, environmental protection, and good governance conventions, which is a dramatic paradox: economic gains with a continued lack of compliance. The paper examines a GSP+ path of Pakistan (2014-2024) and notes that the country ratified all 27 conventions, with deep-rooted weaknesses in their implementation. Among the major human rights issues, the forced disappearance as a problem (2,270 cases pending as of 2025), extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detainments, and impunity are the priority of EU monitoring missions. Violence of labor rights continues in the textile industry, involving bonded labor, child labor and limitations on unions despite the ILO conventions. Freedom of expression has been censored through PECA laws (225 cases in 2023), and minority protection is worsened by force conversion and violence. EU biennial reports, such as the Fourth GSP Assessment (2023) observe improvement in women rights, transgender rights and environment but worry of deteriorating human rights in 2024 despite elections that were harshly limited by restrictions. The paper finds that conditional trade cannot succeed without political intent, with the suggestion that independent accountability, stakeholder participation and transparency of data need to be supported in order to ensure the trade benefits are consistent across sustainable governance.

Keywords: GSP+ Pakistan, Human rights compliance, EU trade conditionality, Enforced disappearances, Labor rights, Governance reforms, International conventions

Overview and Context

Since January 2014, Pakistan has occupied a unique and strategically important position within the European Union's trade architecture as the largest beneficiary of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) arrangement. Pakistan benefits from generous tariff preferences, with mostly zero duties on two-thirds of all product categories, under the GSP+ arrangement aimed at supporting sustainable development and good governance. This preferential access to the world's

largest economic bloc has fundamentally transformed Pakistan's trade trajectory and economic prospects, yet it has simultaneously subjected the country to unprecedented international scrutiny regarding its human rights practices and governance structures (Fatima, 2018).

The significance of Pakistan's GSP+ status extends far beyond conventional trade metrics. The EU is Pakistan's second most important trading partner, accounting for 12.4% of Pakistan's total trade in 2024, representing a crucial lifeline for an economy facing persistent structural vulnerabilities and external pressures. More strikingly, more than 85% of Pakistan's exports, including textiles and clothing, enter the EU duty and quota free, a dependency that underscores the critical importance of maintaining this preferential status for millions of workers, businesses, and households across the country (Ali, 2022).

The trade benefits have been substantial and demonstrable. From 2014 to 2022, Pakistan's exports to the EU increased by 108% whereas imports from the EU increased by 65% and the total trade volume increased from EUR 8.3 billion in 2013 to EUR 14.85 billion. More recent figures illustrate the deepening integration: total EU imports from Pakistan amounted to €8.0 billion in 2023, of which €6.2 billion were imported using the GSP+ preferences, making Pakistan the largest beneficiary among all GSP+ countries. Even in 2024, Pakistan's exports to the EU reached approximately €9.0 billion, with around 89% of textiles and clothing articles imported to the EU from Pakistan entering at preferential tariff rates (Shad, 2021).

The EU's GSP Plus Framework: Purpose and Architecture

To understand the GSP+ Status towards Pakistan, it is important to understand the larger EU development trade policy framework in which it operates. The EU GSP eliminates the importation duty on products entering the EU market of vulnerable developing nations to help them relieve poverty and generate employment opportunities in line with international values and principles, such as labour and human rights, environmental and climate protection, and good governance. It is a calculated policy option to unify the liberalization of trade with governance conditionality because it is realized that access to markets is not sufficient to trigger sustainable development in the absence of institutional reforms and social reforms.

The GSP+ group is the most preferential category of the generalized system of the EU. G+ The GSP+ is a special incentive programme on Sustainable Development and Good Governance that favours vulnerable developing countries, in which they are expected to ratify 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and climate change, and good governance. Pakistan has been classified as a lower-middle-income country with a per capita income of \$1,365 in 2023, which qualifies it to be classified into this special category as long as it exhibits and upholds compliance to these 27 core international conventions (Soomro & Ansari, 2022).

The 27 conventions are a holistic framework that cuts across four important areas, human rights, labour standards, environmental protection and good governance. This is a multidimensional strategy that is based on the belief of the EU that trade preferences must be the drivers of systemic improvements in governance and not just an economic windfall. To comply with GSP+, Pakistan must ratify and actually enforce 27 fundamental international standards on human and labour rights, environment protection and good governance. The fact that the word maintain is used in the form of permanence also emphasizes how compliance requirements are perpetual, which is what makes GSP+ quite unlike traditional trade agreements, where domestic implementation results are largely irrelevant (Wolf, 2014).

Pakistan's Journey with GSP Plus: A Decade of Contradictions

The experience of GSP+ in Pakistan since 2014 sums up one of the inherent paradoxes of conditional trade arrangements: the contradiction between quantifiable economic benefits and contentious advancements in the area of the governance reforms and human rights reforms that the arrangement allegedly promotes. The story is not a success or failure story, but one of huge economic gains and

sustained and, as some commentators would argue, worsening human rights conditions that undermine the premises that the scheme is based upon (Yasmeen, 2025).

The economic cost has been physically and economically revolutionary to certain industries and regions. Textiles and clothing have been the largest EU imports of Pakistan as they constitute 75.8 percent of the total EU imports of Pakistan in 2024. In 2023, more than three-quarters of all preferential imports were in apparel, with bedlinen, terry towels, hosiery, leather product, sports goods, and surgical instrument being the major beneficiaries of preferential treatment. These industries hire millions of people directly and millions more indirectly via supply chains, subcontracting networks, and ancillary services.

But the growth has not been directly converted into better governance, or adherence to human rights. The latest high-level European evaluations indicate that there are considerable differences between the legal obligations and actual performance of Pakistan. This has been observed to have a worsening human rights environment and there have been calls to make Pakistan demonstrate credible and visible improvements in human rights and labour reforms, with human rights being the most difficult part yet the governance appears to be pretty good and the environmental performance is positive. Certain issues identified by the EU officials are the deprivation of liberty issues such as enforced disappearances, which have been identified as priorities of special concern in the recent monitoring missions (Khattak, 2020).

Significance of the 2024 Monitoring Context

The timing of this article is particularly significant. A major EU monitoring mission is scheduled for late 2024, representing what may be described as a critical juncture in Pakistan's GSP+ trajectory. Pakistan's crucial trade advantage under the European Union's GSP plus scheme remains under review, as the European Commission evaluates the country's compliance with international human rights and governance standards. This assessment occurs within a substantially revised EU trade framework, as the EU has revised the GSP+ framework to better reflect evolving global challenges and policy priorities, introducing additional international conventions and stricter procedural requirements, with Pakistan granted a two-year transition period to meet the new standards.

Research Objective and Analytical Framework

This article examines Pakistan's GSP+ experience during the critical 2014-2024 period through a specific analytical lens: the intersection of trade preference conditionality and human rights compliance. Rather than treating economic outcomes and governance obligations as separate analytical domains, this examination situates human rights compliance as both a formal requirement for maintaining preferential status and a substantive measure of whether the GSP+ scheme is achieving its stated development objectives.

The central research question guiding this analysis asks: To what extent has the human rights conditionality embedded in the GSP+ framework influenced Pakistan's governance trajectory, and conversely, what factors have constrained Pakistan's ability to translate legal commitments into practical compliance? This question acknowledges both the potential of conditional trade arrangements to incentivize policy reform and the substantial structural, political, and institutional obstacles that developing countries face in translating international legal obligations into sustainable domestic change.

Definition and Purpose of GSP Plus Under EU Trade Policy

The Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) is one of the foundations of modern EU development and trade policy, and it reflects a unique way of expressing such an approach, directly by connecting preferential access to the market to the conditionality of its governance and observance of human rights. In conjunction with the good governance and sustainable development, on 1 January 2014 the special incentive arrangement, GSP+, was amended and is intended to enable the developing

countries to take on the special burdens and responsibility brought about by the ratification of the core international conventions on human and labour rights, environmental protection and good governance and the practical application thereof.

The Generalised Scheme of Preferences of the EU was initially introduced in 1971 and the EU played a central role in pushing a policy of unilateral trade preferences to reduce poverty and develop countries as it has been followed by the majority of industrialized economies thereafter. Nevertheless, the modern form of GSP+ is an important development of the trade policy design. The new incentive scheme (GSP+) was meant to be used in favour of vulnerable countries which have ratified and effectively enforced major international conventions on sustainable development, human and labour rights as well as good governance (Khaver et al., 2021). The philosophical basis of GSP+ is an expression of a belief that trade preferences must be used as drivers of systemic governance reform and development of human rights and not as economic tools without reference to any larger development agenda. The GSP+ countries enjoy a full suspension of duties on all products including sensitive products among the 66 percent of all EU tariff lines. It is a great incentive system because it offers a significant preferential access to those states that are ready to make wholesale institutional and legal adjustments in accordance with the international human rights standards.

Eligibility Criteria: A Multi-Dimensional Framework

GSP+ eligibility incorporates a complex set of criteria that are aimed at making sure that preferences go to sufficiently vulnerable developing countries and, at the same time, creates clear expectations about governance conditionality. The framework is applied on two main dimensions, which are the economic vulnerability requirements and substantive adherence to international conventions (van Niekerk, 2025).

Economic Vulnerability Requirements

The countries that are eligible to GSP+ should be considered as vulnerable because they lack diversification in exports and they are also not integrated well into the world trading system. To satisfy the vulnerability requirement, the ratio of the beneficiary GSP-covered imports of the GSP countries of all GSP countries must be less than a given threshold. It is one of the criteria that show that the policy is designed in such a way that GSP+ benefits are received by the countries that actually rely on the preferential access and not those that are diversified in terms of commerce and can work efficiently in the global markets (Camling, 2012).

Also, such products must support themselves in the seven largest blocks of the GSP product list and must represent 75 per cent of the national export into the EU. This condition also concentrates benefits in countries with intense export concentration, GSP+ is especially applicable in developing countries in a particular industry, especially the textile industry, agriculture, and light manufacturing.

Governance and Compliance Standards

The substantive mainstay of GSP+ eligibility consists in an overall dedication to the international conventions in four essential areas: human rights, labour, environmental protection, and good governance. GSP+ countries are required to uphold ratification, and to have in effect, implementation, of 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and climate change, and good governance enumerated in the GSP Regulation (Khattak, 2020).

The 27 International Conventions: A Comprehensive Framework

The GSP+ system requires beneficiary countries to ratify and implement 27 core international conventions distributed across four substantive domains. These conventions represent a comprehensive international consensus regarding standards essential for sustainable development and good governance. The following table delineates the composition of these conventions:

Convention Category	Number of Conventions	Representative Conventions
Human Rights Conventions	6	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Convention on the Rights of the Child; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
Labour Rights Conventions (ILO Core Conventions)	8	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87, 1948); Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98, 1949); Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930); Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105, 1957); Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, 1973); Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182, 1999)
Environmental Protection Conventions	9	Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987); Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989); CITES - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973); Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001)
Good Governance Conventions	4	United Nations Convention Against Corruption (2004); United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000)

Source: UN Treaty Body Database

The list of 27 core international conventions includes instruments in the fields of human and labour rights, the environment and good governance and the monitoring bodies under these conventions must not identify a serious failure to its effective implementation.

GSP Plus Status of the Pakistani Historical Timeline (2014-2024)

On 1st January 2014, Pakistani was granted GSP+ status once the country had ratified 27 international conventions and made a promise to harmonize its national laws and policies in accordance with these 27 core agreements. This title marked a progressive step in the trade structure of Pakistan and its diplomatic stance. Pakistan has ratified all the 27 core international conventions on human rights, labour standards, environment protection and good governance in accordance with the GSP Regulation. GSP+ status has had an impressive economic effect on the export of Pakistan. Between 2014 and 2022, the Pak export to the EU expanded 108 percent even as EU import expanded by 65 percent and the overall scale of trade rose to EUR 14.85 billion (as compared to EUR 8.3 billion in 2013) (Shad, 2021). Recent figures show further reliance and use of GSP+ preferences. Pakistan, with EUR6.2 billion out of the total EU imports of the GSP+ preferences, is by far the largest beneficiary of the GSP+ preferences when compared to all the other GSP+ countries. Moreover, the preference utilisation rate of Pakistan is always one of the highest rates of all GSP+ beneficiary countries, as it is evidently over 90 percent in all years between 2014 and 2022; in 2023 it fell to 88 percent. The exports in GSP+ of Pakistan are characterized with intensive concentration in the textile and apparel industries. Preferential tariffs are still used in a very concentrated manner with apparel and textiles,

accounting in 2023 72 percent of all preferential imports (Anheier, 2016).

Monitoring Systems: EU Supervision and Architecture of Compliance

The paradigm of GSP+ maintenance is not based on a particular certification point but on a continuous adherence to the obligations of international conventions through complex monitoring systems developed by the EU.

EU Monitoring Framework

EU oversees the effective implementation and compliance with the requirements of the 27 conventions with regard to reporting. The EU has a dialogue with the authorities and stakeholders in the beneficiary countries and also plans frequent monitoring visits to GSP+ beneficiary countries. Monitoring is reported after every second year in a report to the European Parliament and the Council.

Biennial Review Process

The concerned country and the EU will keep a constant communication and hold meetings regarding the implementation of the 27 conventions, wherein a public report will be submitted to Brussels to review after every two years. This bi-annual cycle is a structured accountability measure whereby beneficiary countries stand a chance of showing improvements and rectifying the shortcomings found (König & Mäder, 2014).

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

The monitoring process directly involves the different stakeholder views. European Parliament emphasizes that, in order to enhance the monitoring of sustainability development, human rights and governance problems, the European Parliament stresses the step to strengthen cooperation between all players so that to increase the information collection and the thorough analyses with reliance on all accessible information and resources, such as reports by the global monitoring organizations as the UN and the ILO, and the inclusion of the civil society and social partners into the process (Awad et al., 2015).

Pakistan's GSP Plus Trajectory: Recent Extension and Monitoring Context

On October 2023, the European Parliament unanimously approved a four-year extension of the GSP+ status to the third country and its developing countries, such as Pakistan, until 2027. Although this extension allowed keeping Pakistan in the list, concerns are growing over the implementation of human rights. The Fourth GSP Report Assessment (2023) evaluates the effectiveness of eight GSP+ beneficiary countries including Pakistan on the effective application of the 27 international core conventions on which GSP+ scheme is based which are obligatory to beneficiary countries so that they can remain beneficiaries of GSP + status. The 27 conventions refer to the four themes of human rights, labour rights, environmental standards and good governance between the years 2020 and 2022. The Fourth Report evaluation shed light on the twin path nature of GSP+ experience in Pakistan: governmental improvement and chronic shortage of execution. The Fourth GSP Report published in 2023 when GSP+ status was renewed once again to Pakistan cited the presence of impunity over cases of enforced disappearances, but noted that the rights of women and children, the protection of transgender people, environmental conservation and good governance continued to improve.

Pakistan Compliance with Human Rights as Conditionality to GSP Plus

The GSP+ regime provides a human rights compliance as a binding conditionality to continue having preferential trade access. Pakistan is also in compliance with the GSP Regulation, and has ratified all the 27 fundamental international conventions on human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, and good governance. Nevertheless, ratification is not a kind of compliance by its own, and the substantive enforcement of these conventions in the domestic legal and institutional system

in Pakistan is a controversial and unfinished task.

The human rights binding to Pakistan is incorporated in seven major international treaties that constitute the UN human rights system. There are reported cases of serious problems on human rights, such as, credible reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, enforced disappearance, torture, harsh prison conditions, arbitrary detention, severe limitations of freedom of expression, and media freedom. These are continuous breaches emphasizing the disparity between the official legal engagement and the actual action (KHAN).

The following table delineates Pakistan's specific human rights treaty obligations

International Convention	Ratification Year	Key Obligations	Primary Article Areas
International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights (ICCPR)	2010	Right to life, liberty, freedom of association, due process, fair trial	Articles 6-27
International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1968 (accession)	Right to work, social security, education, health, adequate living standards	Articles 6-15
Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1996	Eliminate discrimination against women in public and private spheres; gender equality; reproductive rights	Articles 1-16
Convention Against Torture And Other Cruel, Inhuman Or Degrading Treatment Or Punishment (CAT)	1997	Prohibit torture; establish accountability mechanisms; provide compensation to victims	Articles 1-33
Convention On The Rights Of The Child (CRC)	1990	Protect children's rights to education, health, protection from exploitation and abuse	Articles 1-54
International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1997	Eliminate racial discrimination; protect minority rights; prevent hate speech	Articles 1-25
Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD)	2011	Ensure disability rights mainstreaming; eliminate barriers to participation; accessibility	Articles 1-50

Compliance Mechanism by EU and International Agencies

To facilitate effective implementation of the conventions and also in meeting the requirement of reporting, the EU carries out monitoring activities with the GSP+ countries. The monitoring process goes beyond the conventional verification systems to include the involvement of multi- stakeholders in the governmental, civil society, business and international organizations domains.

Various levels of Pakistani authorities, as well as civil society, trade unions, business organisations and international organisations, played a part by offering information in the latest Monitoring Mission of June 2022. This holistic method acknowledges that the assessment of human rights compliance needs to be triangulated around various independent sources and opinions of stakeholders in order to address the issues of information asymmetry and biases in the state-reported information (Ali, 2022). In the case of the action of the EU against Pakistan, it has focused on 13 priority areas with the Fourth GSP Report pointing out that there are still problems of impunity when dealing with cases of enforced disappearance but there is a constant improvement in women and children rights, protection of

transgender people, environmental conservation and good governance. The order of the priorities indicates the EU evaluation of the most problematic areas of implementation that need to be filled in as soon as possible.

Priority Area	Description
Enforced disappearances	Cases of missing persons with official involvement and impunity
Torture prevention	Measures to prevent torture in detention and law enforcement
Death penalty	Abolition or moratorium on the use of the death penalty
Violence against women	Protection against domestic and gender-based violence
Children's rights	Safeguarding children's rights and welfare
Protection of transgender people	Legal and social protections for transgender community
Environmental conservation	Policies for biodiversity, pollution control, and sustainable resource management
Good governance	Transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures
Fight against corruption	Enforcement of anti-corruption laws and institutional reforms
Drug control	Measures to combat illegal drug trafficking and abuse
Labour rights implementation	Enforcement of core labor standards including freedom of association and child labor laws
Human rights compliance	Compliance with international human rights conventions
Reporting and transparency	Timely and transparent reporting on implementation progress

Source: The Fourth GSP Report EU

This comprehensive focus reflects the EU’s critical attention to social, legal, environmental, and governance challenges facing Pakistan under the GSP+ trade benefit framework. The Fourth GSP report underscores ongoing issues especially in impunity cases while acknowledging progress in women's and children's rights and environmental protections.

Reporting and Reviews: EU Reviews and NGO Shadow Reporting

Shadow reporting systems are important monitoring tools. In the 3rd UPR, 289 recommendations were given to Pakistan and out of these 168 were accepted, 117 were noted and four were rejected, with a significant number of the accepted recommendations not being implemented or only partially implemented. This implementation gap throws some light on the gap between the official promises and the real translation into institutional and legal change (Tregidga, 2017).

Supplementary evaluation that yields gaps in implementation is given by independent civil society organizations and international human rights bodies. This shadow reporting role is used to cross-check and criticize official government accounts on compliance, and it offers European policy-makers alternative sources of information.

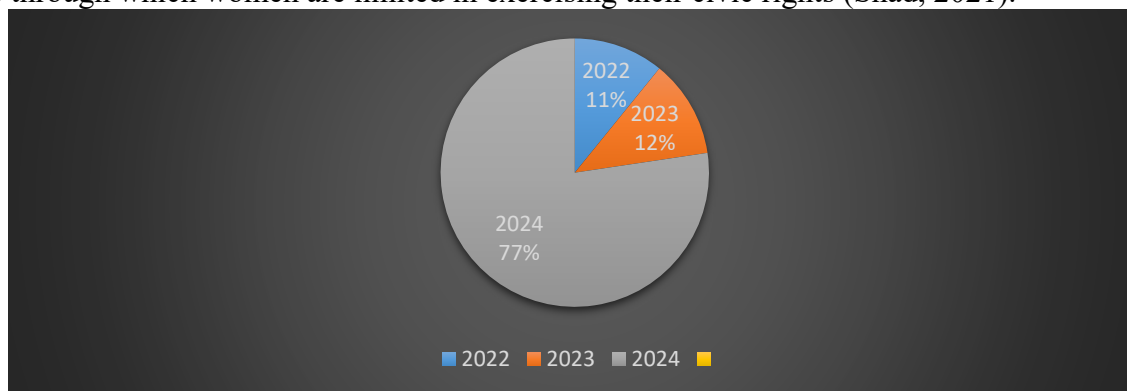
Challenge 1: Human Rights Deterioration of climate

In Pakistan, the systemic human rights compliance is very much a challenge. Major human rights

concerns were provable cases of illegal or arbitrary executions, including extrajudicial executions; forced disappearance; torture and instances of inhuman, cruel, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government or its agents; severe and life-threatening conditions of prisons; arbitrary detention; and political prisoners. In August 2025, former EU ambassador Riina Kionka requested Pakistan to demonstrate credible and visible improvements in human rights and labour reforms, where the human rights situation is worsening, considering that human rights have been the most difficult issue despite the governance appearing pretty good, and environmental progress is in the positive.

Challenge 2: Censorship of Freedom of Association and Civil Society

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are severely limited, with violence against journalists, unreasonable arrests and disappearance of journalists, censorship, criminal defamation, and blasphemy laws being used. There is also substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, excessive restrictions on a law of the operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. According to the data gathered using the RTI Act 2013, the number of PECA cases is alarming: in 2022, the number of PECA cases was 212, and in 2023, the number of PECA cases has grown to 225, and the FIRs registered have reached 164 in 2024. Most instances include women, who are observed to be exercising their constitutional right to freedom of expression (Article 19A) online, and this has made the internet a hostile digital space through which women are limited in exercising their civic rights (Shad, 2021).



Percentage of Cases Registered under the PECA Act 2016 (Data obtained through RTI Act 2017)

Challenge 3: Labour Rights Implementation Gaps

The textile industry's dependence on GSP+ creates acute labor rights challenges. The following table illustrates key labour convention compliance gaps:

ILO Convention	Ratification Status	Principal Obligation	Implementation Challenge
Convention 87 (Freedom of Association)	Ratified	Right to form and join trade unions freely	Restrictions on workers' organizing; government interference
Convention 98 (Collective Bargaining)	Ratified	Right to bargain collectively	Limited collective bargaining coverage; employer retaliation
Convention 29 (Forced Labour)	Ratified	Prohibition on forced labor	Bonded labor in agriculture and textile sectors persists
Convention 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour)	Ratified	Eliminate all forms of forced labor	Limited enforcement in supply chains; impunity
Convention 138 (Minimum Age)	Ratified	Minimum age 15 for employment	Child labor remains prevalent in agriculture and informal sectors
Convention 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour)	Ratified	Eliminate worst forms of child labor	Trafficking, hazardous work, and sexual exploitation continue

Challenge 4: Legal and Institutional Gaps

After the 18th constitutional amendment, Ministries have been devolved to the provinces, creating an environment of ambiguity, especially when compliance with 27 Conventions is a necessary condition for retaining the GSP+ status. This constitutional structure generates coordination failures and inconsistent implementation across provincial jurisdictions.

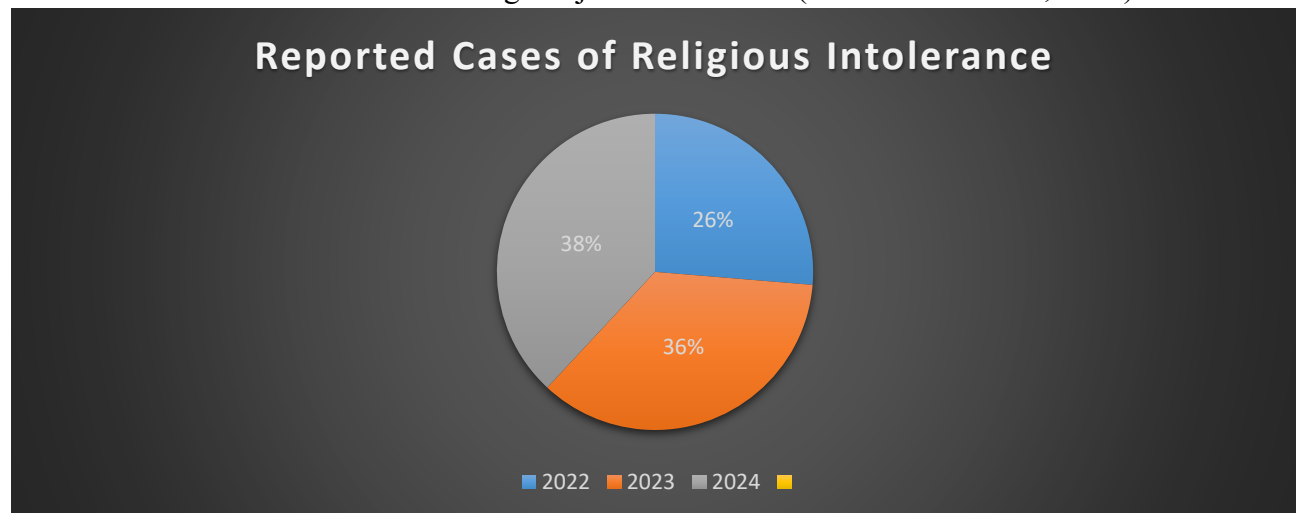
According to the 2023 HRR, the government rarely took credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses, with military and intelligence services operating independently and without effective civilian oversight. The absence of effective accountability mechanisms undermines the deterrent and remedial functions essential for rights protection (Saleem, 2024).

Challenge 5: Enforced Disappearances and Impunity

Enforced disappearances represent a particularly acute compliance failure. The issue of forced disappearances has been identified as one of the EU's priorities, with the EU noting that while structures such as the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances have been established, problems persist in the context of GSP+ compliance. According to figures released in July by the government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, 10,285 missing-person cases were filed with the commission since 2011, with 8,015 considered resolved while 2,270 remained pending, with the commission failing to initiate timely proceedings on missing-person cases and provide adequate support to relatives (Abdullah, 2025).

Challenge 6: Minority Rights and Religious Freedom

The 2022 HRR conveyed concerns regarding the increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women and girls from religious minority communities, especially Hindus and Christians, with violence in the name of religion increasingly becoming the status quo in Pakistan. On April 16, 2023, Radical Islamists in Pakistan attacked and demolished an over 100-year-old worship place of the minority Ahmadi community in Punjab province. Below is the breakdown of cases obtained from AIG Monitoring Punjab via RTI Law (Iftikhar & Hashmi, 2025)



Challenge 7: Political and Administrative Obstacles

The 2024 parliamentary elections, as the U.S. State Department claimed, were featured with unwarranted limitations of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of peaceful gathering, electoral violence, and limits on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since 2015, the Varieties of Democracies project has categorised Pakistan as an electoral autocracy and 119th of 179 countries on a 2024 Liberal Democracy Index, and the EIU Democracy Index 2023

has deteriorated Pakistan to an authoritarian country despite being a hybrid regime (Sammi et al., 2024).

Challenge 8: Economic/Structural Barriers to Compliance

The weaknesses in the economy within the context of Pakistan essentially limit the ability of the country to implement all human rights as well as governance reforms as required by GSP+. The problem facing Pakistan in both the short and medium term is reversing the age old political and economic uncertainties and the fact that inflation has declined and trading has recorded its all time high in the stock market does not exactly affect the lives of the ordinary citizens who are still today living under the high cost of living prices of utilities and other basic products.

The Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb introduced a budget of 18.877 trillion in the fiscal year 2024-2025, which is 30 percent higher than the previous year budget, but with high tax increases where direct taxes will increase by 48 percent and indirect taxes by 35 percent, with the defence sector getting the biggest share on the budget (Anus et al., 2025).

In early April, the World Bank predicts that economic growth of Pakistan will only recover to 1.8 in 2024 (after declining to about 0.4 in 2023), and the inflation rate of Pakistan is highest in Asia, at 17.3 in April, and just 2.6 months of imports cover in March 2024, still below the safe level of three months.

Indicator	2013	2019	2024 (or latest FY)	GSP+ Impact
GDP Growth Rate (%)	4.1	2.1	2.4 (FY24 full year; Q1 FY25: 0.9)	Destabilized
Inflation Rate (%)	7.4	10.6	23.4 (avg FY24)	Severe pressure
Unemployment Rate (%)	6.2	5.8	8.5 (est. 2024)	Rising concerns
Public Debt-to-GDP (%)	63.1	72.1	76.8 (mid-2024)	Unsustainable
FDI (\$ billions)	1.45	2.18	1.75 (FY24)	Disappointing

Source: FY Economic Survey Pakistan

Challenge 8: Case Studies of Compliance Failures and EU Warnings

The EU has explicitly warned Pakistan about GSP+ compliance risks. Islamabad's readmission for the GSP benefits post-2023 is being seen as a failed incentive to a country which neither has maintained EU's values nor reciprocated in economic cooperation proportionately, with former human rights minister Dr Shireen Mazari stating that 'enforced disappearances and violation of human rights have become common in Pakistan', and stressing that the EU might not extend its GSP preferential tariff scheme for Pakistan because of human rights violations.

The EU ambassador was asked whether Pakistan needed to do more to fulfil the requirements of the scheme, to which he said: "Yes, we are saying that. We are saying that it should be, well, needs to be, to do more".

Compliance Issue	EU Finding	Pakistan Response	Status
Enforced Disappearances	Persistent impunity; 2,270 cases pending	Established Commission of Inquiry	Ongoing concern
Military Courts	Trial closure violates fair trial rights	Government defends as security necessity	Critical warning
Freedom of Expression	Cybercrime laws enable suppression	Parliament passed PECA Amended law 2025	Deteriorating
Labour Rights	Enforcement gaps in textile sector	Some legislative amendments	Inadequate
Minority Rights	Forced conversions and violence persist	Rhetorical commitments only	Worsening
Women's Rights	Progress acknowledged but implementation lagging	Institutional mechanisms established	Mixed results

Conclusion

Pakistan's GSP+ experience from 2014-2024 illuminates' fundamental tensions embedded in conditional trade arrangements as development and human rights instruments. The garments sector has the prospective to spur export-based growth in Pakistan as it is characterized with high value addition of the exports, labor-intensive, and low level of energy consumption, but is limited by political unstable conditions, security issues and lack of institutional capacity.

The essential nexus between the favors of trade and the observance of human rights is a topic of debatable practice. The immense growth in exports that doubled to EUR3.56 billion in the year 2013 and later to EUR9.0 billion in the year 2024 has not been equally translated in terms of enhancing human rights, accountability in enforced disappearance, enforcement of labour rights and protection of minorities in Pakistan. This gap in implementation is a manifestation of structural political restriction, military control of civilian governance, and the rights protection in favor of security interests.

With the way Pakistan has cleared its 2025 monitoring session and the likely reuse in the new GSP+ framework (2027-2033), Pakistan is facing a critical crossroad. This interplay of increasing economic strains, declining political stability, security intensifying insecurity, and augmented EU examination is creating a test to scale never seen before of whether conditional trade deals can drive genuine governance change in geopolitically complicated developing nations.

The sustainability of the GSP+ in the future lies in whether Pakistan is ready to make radical changes to align its own trade policy, development agenda and protection of human rights as inseparable needs and not incompatible priorities. This involves radical changes in the governance philosophy, the institutional framework, and political commitment alterations that are much more challenging to implement than the formal ratification of international conventions that presently define the compliance strategy in Pakistan.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening Human Rights Enforcement Mechanisms

- Establish independent accountability mechanisms with prosecutorial authority and resource allocation
- Implement systematic torture reporting procedures with transparent investigation protocols
- Create victim compensation and rehabilitation programs as deterrents to future violations
- Ensure military and intelligence service accountability through civilian oversight structures

2. Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement

- Institutionalize multi-stakeholder consultations with government, private sector, and civil society
- Create transparent complaint and redress mechanisms accessible to workers and citizens
- Support civil society organizations through legal frameworks ensuring freedom of association
- Establish regular labour inspection regimes in textile and export sectors with independent verification

3. Improving Data Collection and Reporting for Compliance Verification

- Develop comprehensive data systems for disappearances, detentions, and rights violations
- Establish independent statistical agencies separate from security apparatus influence
- Create transparent reporting protocols aligned with international monitoring standards
- Implement regular internal audits on convention implementation progress

4. Addressing Political and Socio-Economic Barriers to Implementation

- Depoliticize human rights enforcement through institutional autonomy and protected budgets

- Address economic pressures through diversified development strategies reducing export concentration
- Strengthen provincial capacity for implementation through fiscal transfers and technical support

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