

In a Faisalabad courtroom in the spring of 2026, judges looked at a Christian girl whose birth record said she was thirteen and decided she did not look it. Maria Shahbaz had been taken from her family in July 2025, married to a man in his thirties, and presented as a willing convert. Pakistan's Federal Constitutional Court let the marriage stand. Her lawyers say the bench preferred appearance to the birth certificate. The European Parliament passed a resolution on her case in July 2026. The court later agreed to review its own order. By then the pattern was already familiar: a child disappears, a certificate appears, and the state treats the paperwork as the truth.

That is the machinery documented in *Stolen Girls, a study by Voice for Justice and Jubilee Campaign*, presented at the European Parliament on 14 July 2026 and submitted in writing to the 63rd session of the UN Human Rights Council. It records 210 cases of abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls and women in Pakistan between January 2019 and December 2025. The authors describe a six-stage sequence: abduction, conversion, a fabricated marriage contract, a statement recorded while the girl is still with her captors, judicial acceptance of those documents, and impunity. This is not a claim that every disputed marriage in Pakistan is a crime. It is a claim, backed by files, that a recognizable script is being used against a religious minority, and that the institutions meant to interrupt it often complete it.

The age profile makes the "love marriage" defence difficult to sustain. More than 83 percent of the victims were under 18. Forty-one were younger than 14. One hundred and thirty-four were between 14 and 17. The report puts the average victim at about 12.8 and the average alleged perpetrator at 35.8, a gap of roughly 23 years, and in some files more than 30. Several documented victims were seven, eight, nine, ten or eleven. Yarosha Saleem was 11 when she was taken in Sheikhpura; police took six months to register the FIR. Laiba Sohail was 10 in Faisalabad; the marriage contract moved her date of birth so she would clear the legal line, and described her as self-sufficient. Nisha Abbas, 14, of Lahore, was issued a conversion certificate by an association styling itself the New Muslim Welfare Association,

renamed Maryam, and declared 18. In 92 percent of the files the age on the marriage record had been altered or misrepresented, with a fabricated average near 18.7, just old enough to look lawful. In 96 percent the girl's name was changed after conversion, commonly to Ayesha, Fatima, Khadija or Zainab. A new name does more than mark a new faith. It breaks the trail between the child the parents are searching for and the adult the court is asked to believe in.

The map is not subtle. Punjab accounts for 186 of the 210 cases, 88.6 percent. Sindh has 22, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa two. Lahore alone has 53, Faisalabad 39, Gujranwala 16, Karachi 14, Sheikhupura 13. Ten districts hold 173 cases. Better reporting in Punjabi cities explains some of the concentration, not nine-tenths of it. Christians in Pakistan are a small minority, densest in central Punjab, often poor, often employed in brick kilns, sanitation and domestic work. The abductor is frequently not a stranger. He is a neighbour, an employer, a man who has watched the walk to school.

The script is older than this dataset. In October 2019, 14-year-old Huma Younus was taken from her home in Karachi while her parents were out, converted, and married to Abdul Jabbar. Courts declined to treat her age as decisive. In April 2020, 14-year-old Maira Shahbaz was abducted at gunpoint in Faisalabad. A sessions court sent her to a shelter. The Lahore High Court sent her back to her abductor. She later escaped and told her family she had been threatened with the release of videos of her assault. The family went into hiding. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom lists her as a victim of forced renunciation of faith. In Karachi the same year, 13-year-old Arzoo Raja was married to a 44-year-old man on the day of her disappearance. School records, a church register and the national database put her birth in July 2007. The documents before the Sindh High Court called her 18 and renamed her Arzoo Fatima. The court initially handed her to the man her mother was not allowed to meet in the courthouse.

Farah Shaheen was 12 when she was taken in Faisalabad. Months later she was found

chained in a cattle pen at the house of a 45-year-old man who had married her and had her converted. Zarvia Parvaiz told a court she had been drugged, raped, beaten, burnt with cigarettes and electrocuted. In 2022, UN experts took up her case alongside Mehwish Patras, Chashman Kanwal and Saba Nadeem. Chashman was issued a conversion certificate by a branch of Pakistan Sunni Tehreek, renamed Ayesha, and declared an adult. The same experts, in a statement of 11 April 2024, described Mishal Rasheed, abducted at gunpoint in 2022 while preparing for school, sexually assaulted, converted and married. They noted another 13-year-old Christian girl, taken on 13 March 2024, whose marriage certificate recorded her age as 18.

The warnings have been repetitive because the practice has been. Amnesty International, in an October 2024 submission on Pakistan, wrote that women and girls from religious minorities, "in particular, Hindu girls in Sindh, remain vulnerable to forced conversion and forced marriage." Citing the Centre for Social Justice, Amnesty recorded at least 136 cases of abduction and forced conversion in 2023, 75 percent involving children, after 78 in 2021 and 124 in 2022. It also noted that a Prohibition of Forced Conversion Bill was rejected in 2021 by the parliamentary committee set up to protect minorities from forced conversion. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, in *Streets of Fear*, its review of freedom of religion from July 2024 to June 2025, said the pattern of minor non-Muslim girls disappearing and resurfacing as converts and wives had persisted. It pointed to cleric-politician Mian Abdul Haq, known as Mian Mithu, long accused of facilitating conversions through his seminary in Ghotki, and sanctioned by the United Kingdom in 2022. HRCP recorded police telling families that returning a girl after conversion would be *haram*. In July 2024 Faisalabad police recovered Christian minor Laiba Suhail, abducted in February, converted and illegally married. Another girl, Alina, was still missing.

UN special procedures have said the same thing three times in four years. On 16 January 2023, on 11 April 2024, and again on 22 April 2026, experts including the rapporteurs on freedom of religion, minority issues, trafficking, and contemporary forms of slavery warned

that Christian and Hindu girls were being abducted, converted, married, trafficked and held in domestic servitude, and that perpetrators were escaping behind the phrase “love marriage.” The 2024 statement is blunt: the impunity “can no longer be tolerated or justified,” and “under international law, consent is irrelevant when the victim is a child under the age of 18.” The 2026 statement said the practice was being fuelled by impunity, that change of religion must be free of coercion, and that marriage cannot be based on consent a child cannot legally give. For 2025 the experts estimated that about 75 percent of those affected were Hindu and 25 percent Christian, with almost 80 percent of incidents in Sindh. That is a different cut from *Stolen Girls*, which counts only Christian cases and finds them overwhelmingly in Punjab. The Centre for Social Justice’s *Human Rights Observer* bridges the two: 515 cases of forced conversion of minority girls from 2021 to 2025, 72 percent under 18, 69 percent Hindu, 31 percent Christian. The communities differ. The method does not.

USCIRF’s 2026 annual report says the reports continued through 2025: a 12-year-old Christian girl converted and married to a 35-year-old man in Sindh; a 15-year-old Hindu girl, Shahneela, allegedly taken at gunpoint from her home in Matli, a case serious enough for the Sindh Human Rights Commission to express concern. In January 2025, 14-year-old Ariha Gulzar was abducted at gunpoint from her home in Okara by a 40-year-old neighbour and two accomplices, who threatened her father with rape and trafficking if the family pursued the case. At the Lahore High Court she said she was 18, Muslim, and married. The judge did not believe the statement was free, treated the birth certificate as valid, and ordered her returned to her mother. In December 2025, 13-year-old Aneeqa was abducted in Sheikhpura. In January 2026 the Lahore High Court sent her home and held that a minor cannot consent to marriage or to a change of religion. In August 2024 the same court returned three Christian sisters, aged 9, 13 and 16, daughters of brick-kiln workers in Kasur, after they had been coached to say they had converted and wanted to stay with the families holding them. These rulings exist. They are still described as landmarks, which is a measure of how rare they are.

The ordinary case still runs the other way. In June 2026, 13-year-old Amber Nadeem of Faisalabad told a magistrate she had been coached to claim she was an adult who had converted and married freely. The magistrate ordered an age assessment and a shelter. A court then handed her to the accused and gave him bail. In April 2025, 16-year-old Jessica Iqbal was taken in Lahore by a 32-year-old neighbour. Police released him before she was found. When she appeared before a magistrate she said the conversion and marriage were her choice. In May 2025, 16-year-old Sumaira, who had been changing her route to school to avoid a man of 28, was taken, made to thumbprint certificates, and then, according to the case file, drugged and assaulted. Saneha Masih, 15, was taken from her aunt's house in Sialkot in January 2025. The certificates the police showed her father carried date discrepancies. She was eventually recovered. Recovery is not the norm, and recovery is not safety. Families describe threats, mob pressure, and the fear that a girl who returns will be accused of apostasy.

The law has moved, and not enough. Sindh has long set 18 as the age of marriage and still produces a steady stream of Hindu and Christian child brides, because the certificate defeats the statute. Punjab's Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2026, and a similar law for Islamabad passed in 2025, raise the formal age. In August 2026 a Lahore High Court judge held that a marital relationship with a girl under 18 can amount to child abuse, punishable by five to seven years and a substantial fine. That is useful, and it arrives after seven years in which 175 of the Christian victims in this one study were children. What Pakistan still does not have is a national age of marriage of 18, a specific offence of forced conversion, or a rule that a statement taken in the custody of the alleged abductor is worthless. Courts continue to treat a *nikahnama* and a conversion certificate as evidence of volition. Registrars continue to accept them. Police continue to delay FIRs, or to explain that the girl has changed religion and the matter is closed.

None of this requires a conspiracy theory. It requires poverty, a minority status that makes complaints easy to ignore, clerics and notaries willing to issue papers, and a judiciary that

has been taught to hear “she is Muslim now” as the end of the inquiry. International law already answers that. Pakistan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ICCPR. UN experts have told it, repeatedly, that Article 18 forbids coercion in religion and that a child’s consent to marriage is a legal fiction. Amnesty has documented the rising count and the burial of the conversion bill. HRCP has described police invoking religious prohibition to refuse a rescue. USCIRF has kept the country among the worst violators of religious freedom, with these abductions as part of the record.

Two hundred and ten Christian girls in seven years is a floor, not a ceiling. It excludes most Hindu victims, the cases never registered, and the families who settle because the alternative is a courtroom in which their daughter will be asked, in front of the man who took her, whether she came willingly. The remedy is not another statement of concern. It is a uniform marriage age of 18, a criminal offence of forced conversion, a bar on custody and statements while the girl is with the accused, mandatory age verification against the national database, prosecution of the notaries and clerics who falsify papers, and protection for the families who file the FIR. Until that exists, the certificate will keep winning, and the child will keep losing her name.

References and Further Reading

Amnesty International. (2024). Pakistan: Human rights under assault (Index No. ASA 33/8576/2024).

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ASA3385762024ENGLISH.pdf>

Centre for Social Justice. (2025, April 16). Human Rights Observer. <https://csjpak.org>

Dawn. (2022, December 11). 100 Christians faced faith conversion, child marriage in three

years: Report. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1725714>

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. (2025). Streets of fear: Freedom of religion or belief in 2024/25. <https://hrcp-web.org>

Jubilee Campaign. (2026). Written statement submitted to the Human Rights Council, sixty-third session: Coerced religious conversions of underage minority girls in Pakistan (A/HRC/63/NGO/258).

<https://jubileecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/HRC-63-Pakistan.pdf>

Jubilee Campaign. (2026, August 4). Stolen girls part 1: Exposing the hidden suffering of Christian minor girls in Pakistan.

<https://jubileecampaign.org/stolen-girls-part-1-exposing-the-hidden-suffering-of-christian-minor-girls-in-pakistan/>

Jubilee Campaign. (2026, August 7). Stolen girls part 2: Before their prime.

<https://jubileecampaign.org/stolen-girls-part-2-before-their-prime/>

Jubilee Campaign. (2026, August 18). Stolen girls part 5: Pakistan's shameful track record.

<https://jubileecampaign.org/stolen-girls-part-5-pakistans-shameful-track-record/>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024, April 11). Pakistan: UN experts alarmed by lack of protection for minority girls from forced religious conversions and forced marriage.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/pakistan-un-experts-alarmed-lack-protection-minority-girls-forced-religious>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2026, April 22). UN experts concerned by forced conversion through marriage in Pakistan.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/un-experts-concerned-forced-conversion-through-marriage-pakistan>

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. (2026). Annual report 2026: Pakistan chapter.

<https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2026-03/USCIRF%202026%20Annual%20Report%20Pakistan.pdf>

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. (n.d.). Maira Shahbaz. FoRB Victims Database.

<https://www.uscifr.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/maira-shahbaz>

Voice for Justice & Jubilee Campaign. (2026). Stolen girls: Exposing the hidden suffering of Christian minority girls in Pakistan.

<https://jubileecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Stolen-Girls.pdf>

Voicepk. (2026, July 29). 'Stolen Girls': Data from new report shows average victim of forced conversions is only 12 years old.

<https://voicepk.net/2026/07/stolen-girls-data-from-new-report-shows-average-victim-of-forced-conversions-is-only-12-years-old/>

Case reporting used in the essay

AsiaNews. (2026, January 15). Lahore High Court returns 13-year-old Christian girl to family after her abduction for marriage.

<https://www.asianews.it/en/south-asia/pakistan/lahore-high-court-returns-13-year-old-christian-girl-to-family-after-her-abduction-for-marriage>

Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement. (2025, April 8). Pakistani court orders return of

abducted 14-year-old Christian girl to her mother in landmark ruling.

<https://claas.org.uk/2025/04/08/pakistani-court-orders-return-of-abducted-14-year-old-christian-girl-to-her-mother-in-landmark-ruling/>

Christian Today. (2024, August 23). Christian parents regain custody of three girls in Pakistan.

<https://www.christiantoday.com/news/christian-parents-regain-custody-of-three-girls-in-pakistan>

International Christian Concern. (2026, May 13). Stolen innocence: The abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls in Pakistan.

<https://persecution.org/2026/05/13/stolen-innocence-the-abduction-and-forced-marriage-of-christian-girls-in-pakistan/>