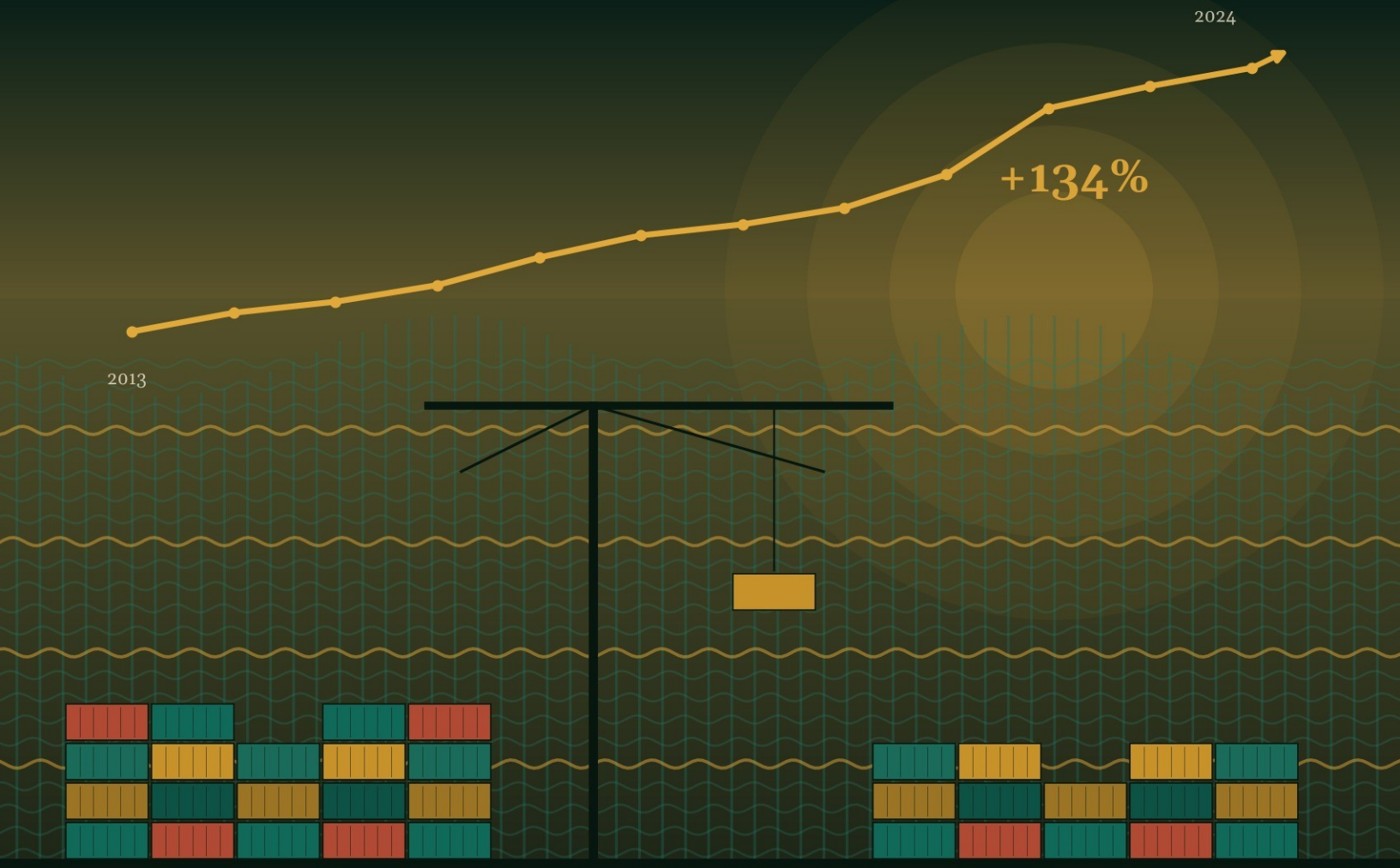
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CONTINUITY, NOT DISENGAGEMENT

The Case for Pakistan's GSP+ Status



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KEY ARGUMENT

The question is not whether Pakistan has achieved perfection in implementing its international obligations, but whether the progress made and reforms underway warrant continuity and constructive engagement rather than punitive disengagement. Suspending preferential access would risk undermining an economic partnership that supports labour-intensive industries, sustains millions of livelihoods and creates opportunities for women and other vulnerable segments of society. Pakistan's case, therefore, is not a plea for preferential treatment or an assertion that its reform journey is complete. It is an argument for recognising measurable progress, addressing outstanding shortcomings through sustained cooperation and preserving a partnership whose economic and developmental benefits are best advanced through engagement rather than disengagement.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Pakistan became a beneficiary on 1 January 2014. According to its Eurostat-derived figures, bilateral trade increased from €6.9 billion in 2013 to €12 billion in 2024, a rise of approximately 75 per cent. More significantly, Pakistan's exports to the EU increased from €3.56 billion to €8.33 billion over the same period, representing 134 per cent growth. [1]
- Pakistan's textile, apparel and hosiery exports to the EU increased from €1.05 billion in 2013 to €3.51 billion in 2024, an increase exceeding 235 per cent. [2] A withdrawal of preferences could expose these groups to reduced orders, weaker competitiveness, factory closures and employment insecurity.
- On 4 March 2014, the government established the Treaty Implementation Cell (TIC), with the Attorney General for Pakistan serving as its Convener and the Ministry of Commerce providing its secretariat.
- A particularly important achievement was Pakistan's removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2022, following the completion of action plans addressing deficiencies in anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing frameworks. Pakistan was subsequently removed from the EU list of high-risk third countries in 2023.
- The answer is not to lower human rights standards for Pakistan or any other country. It is to apply them across the board, to all countries, not just Pakistan.
- Pakistan should approach the new GSP framework from a position of strength, building on a decade of proactive engagement and reform. The transition period through the end of 2028 should be treated as an opportunity to showcase its measurable progress and secure approval under the new arrangement.

INTRODUCTION

Can a decade of economic partnership, institutional reform and shared prosperity be reduced to a catalogue of shortcomings? The European Union's GSP+ scheme has been far more than a trade concession for Pakistan; it has served as a catalyst for export-led growth, industrial competitiveness, employment generation and deeper integration into global value chains, while encouraging progress in human rights, labour standards, environmental protection and governance. Yet, despite these economic and institutional gains, Pakistan's GSP+ status is increasingly coming under scrutiny, with growing calls in certain European policy and advocacy circles for the suspension of its preferential trade status on the grounds of alleged shortcomings in fulfilling its international obligations. This debate raises an important question: should a decade of partnership and progress be overshadowed by a selective focus on the challenges that remain?

As the EU prepares to transition to its new GSP framework from 1 January 2027, the debate over Pakistan's eligibility assumes even greater significance. The question is not whether Pakistan has achieved perfection in implementing its international obligations, but whether the progress made and reforms underway warrant continuity and constructive engagement rather than punitive disengagement. Suspending preferential access would risk undermining an economic partnership that supports labour-intensive industries, sustains millions of livelihoods and creates opportunities for women and other vulnerable segments of society. Pakistan's case, therefore, is not a plea for preferential treatment or an assertion that its reform journey is complete. It is an argument for recognising measurable progress, addressing outstanding shortcomings through sustained cooperation and preserving a partnership whose economic and developmental benefits are best advanced through engagement rather than disengagement.

1. ASSESSING THE STAKES INVOLVED IN GSP+

The EU's GSP+ is not simply a tariff-reduction arrangement. It is an instrument of development diplomacy through which the European Union seeks to promote human rights, internationally recognised labour standards, environmental protection and good governance by linking preferential market access to the implementation of 27 international conventions.

Pakistan became a beneficiary on 1 January 2014. The arrangement has since evolved into one of the most consequential pillars of Pakistan–EU economic engagement. The Government of Pakistan's 2025 publication, *GSP+ Pakistan Insights: Partners in Progress for the Future*, provides an important empirical basis for assessing this partnership. According to its Eurostat-derived figures, bilateral trade increased from €6.9 billion in 2013 to €12 billion in 2024, a rise of approximately 75 per cent. More significantly, Pakistan's exports to the EU increased from €3.56 billion to €8.33 billion over the same period, representing 134 per cent growth. [1]

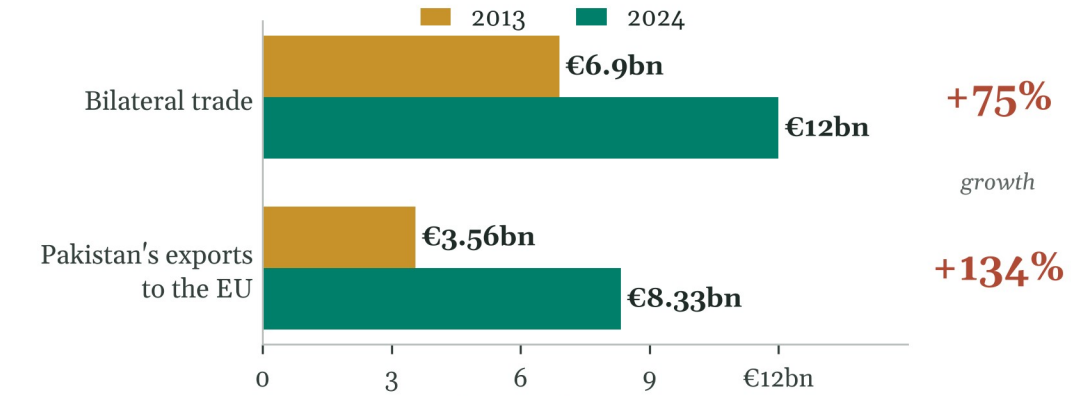
GSP+ at a Glance

+134% Growth in Pakistan's exports to the EU, 2013–2024 (€3.56 bn → €8.33 bn)	**+75%** Growth in bilateral trade, 2013–2024 (€6.9 bn → €12 bn)	**+235%** Growth in textile, apparel and hosiery exports to the EU (€1.05 bn → €3.51 bn)
+198% Growth in home textile exports to the EU (€696 m → €2.07 bn)	**6% → 11%** Pakistan's approximate share of the EU home textile market	**27** International conventions linked to GSP+ preferences (beneficiary since 1 Jan 2014)

Source: Government of Pakistan, GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025), citing Eurostat; figures as presented in the brief.

Figure 1: Pakistan–EU Bilateral Trade and Exports

Pakistan–EU bilateral trade and Pakistan's exports to the EU, 2013 vs 2024 (€ billion)



Source: Eurostat figures as reported in GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025).

These figures demonstrate that GSP+ has generated benefits on both sides. Pakistan has gained access to a major consumer market, while European businesses have benefited from an expanding market for their goods, services and industrial inputs. The relationship is therefore reciprocal in its economic consequences, even though the tariff preferences themselves are unilateral.

The next phase should be understood in this context. The transition to the new GSP framework, creates an opportunity to consolidate the gains of the previous decade and establish a more ambitious partnership for 2027–2028 and beyond. The question before European policymakers should not simply be whether Pakistan has achieved perfection in implementing every international convention. No developing country can credibly claim that. The more relevant question is whether the existing framework has encouraged progress, whether Pakistan has demonstrated institutional ownership of its obligations, and whether continued engagement offers a better prospect of sustainable reform than economic disengagement.

2. TRADE PREFERENCES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POVERTY REDUCTION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

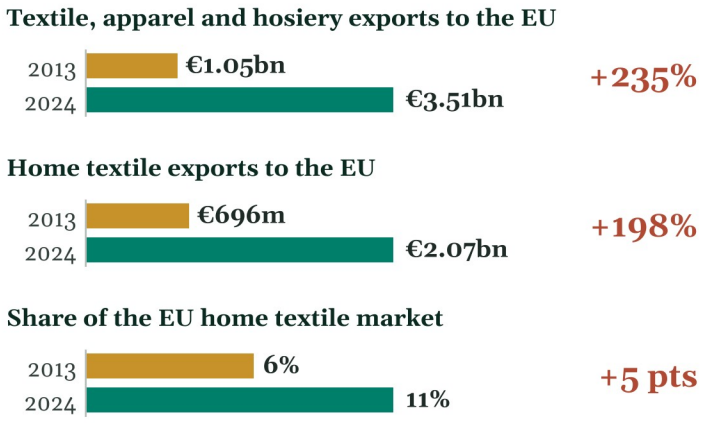
The economic case for continuation becomes particularly compelling when the benefits of GSP+ are examined beyond aggregate export figures. Pakistan′s export relationship with Europe is heavily concentrated in labour-intensive sectors, particularly textiles, garments, hosiery and home textiles. These sectors sustain extensive employment networks, including women workers, skilled and semi-skilled labour, small and medium-sized enterprises, and associated supply chains. According to government data, Pakistan′s textile, apparel and hosiery exports to the EU increased from €1.05 billion in 2013 to €3.51 billion in 2024, an increase exceeding 235 per cent. Home textile exports increased from €696 million to €2.07 billion, representing growth of 198 per cent. Pakistan′s market share in EU home textiles increased from approximately 6 per cent to 11 per cent. [2]

These developments have implications extending well beyond the balance of trade. Export-oriented manufacturing generates employment, supports household incomes, encourages investment in industrial infrastructure and expands opportunities for women′s participation in the formal economy. The continuation of GSP+ therefore has a direct development dimension. Its benefits reach workers and households that have little influence over the country′s political or institutional shortcomings. A withdrawal of preferences could expose these groups to reduced orders, weaker competitiveness, factory closures and employment insecurity.

This is particularly important in a country where poverty reduction and employment generation remain central development challenges. GSP+ should consequently be assessed not merely through the volume of trade it facilitates but also through its contribution to the livelihoods that trade sustains. The continuation of preferences, accompanied by stronger labour inspection and workplace protections, offers a more constructive route towards inclusive growth.

Figure 2: Labour-Intensive Exports and EU Market Share

2013 vs 2024



Source: GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025).
Market share figures are approximate.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The benefits of GSP+ reach workers and households with little influence over institutional shortcomings. Continued preferences, paired with stronger labour inspection and workplace protections, offer a more constructive route to inclusive growth than withdrawal.

3. PAKISTAN'S COMPLIANCE ARCHITECTURE

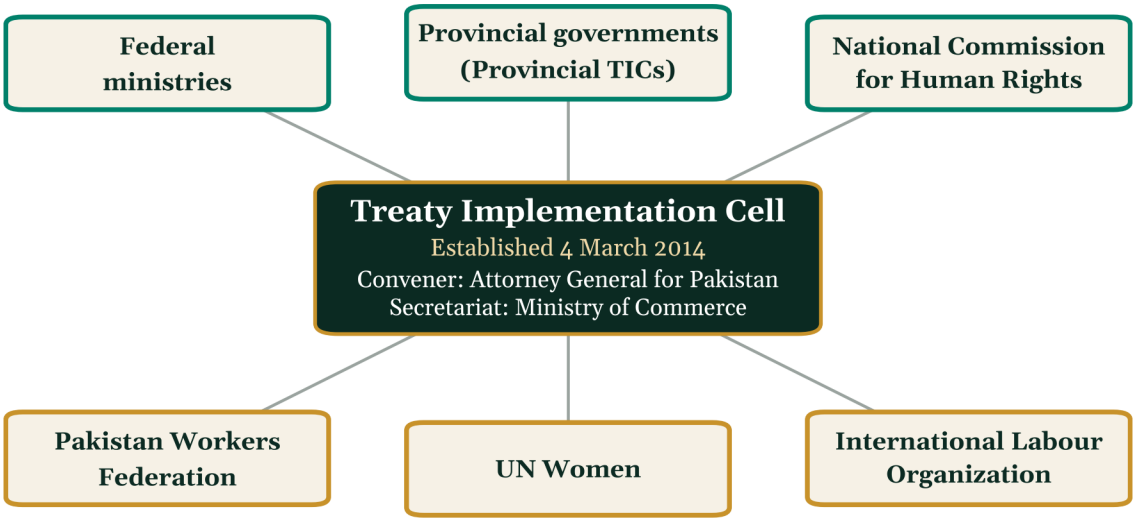
One of the most important, but often overlooked, aspects of Pakistan's GSP+ experience is the institutional machinery established to coordinate implementation. On 4 March 2014, the government established the Treaty Implementation Cell (TIC), with the Attorney General for Pakistan serving as its Convener and the Ministry of Commerce providing its secretariat. Provincial Treaty Implementation Cells were also constituted to address the decentralised character of implementation following the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment.

The institutional composition of the TIC is significant. It brings together federal ministries, provincial governments, the National Commission for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization, UN Women and the Pakistan Workers Federation.[3] This is not merely an administrative arrangement. It provides a mechanism through which international commitments can be translated into domestic legislative, regulatory and institutional action.

It indicates, Pakistan has not treated GSP+ as a temporary export incentive requiring attention only when an EU monitoring mission arrives. It has established a dedicated institutional framework intended to coordinate compliance across multiple layers of government. The distinction between institutional existence and institutional effectiveness must, of course, be maintained. The existence of a committee does not automatically establish successful implementation. Nevertheless, such structures provide the foundations for sustained monitoring, accountability and corrective action. Their performance should be assessed through measurable outcomes rather than dismissed as mere formalism.

Figure 3: Composition of the Treaty Implementation Cell (TIC)

Members and partners brought together by the TIC



Source: Government of Pakistan, GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025), pp. 4–6.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS: ACKNOWLEDGING CHALLENGES WHILE RECOGNIZING DEMONSTRABLE PROGRESS

Human rights constitute the most politically sensitive dimension of Pakistan′s GSP+ engagement. Issues including enforced disappearances, minority protection, freedom of expression, due process and the misuse of blasphemy provisions have attracted sustained international scrutiny. Pakistan cannot dismiss these concerns completely. However, its stronger argument is that a comprehensive assessment must consider both outstanding deficiencies and the legislative and institutional measures introduced to address them.

Pakistan has taken notable steps in this regard. First, it has strengthened independent human rights institutions. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) is case in point. The Commission received A-status accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), which illustrates its compliance with the UN Paris Principles. Its Chairperson was also elected to the GANHRI Bureau. This is an important institutional development because an independently accredited national human rights institution can strengthen domestic oversight and engagement with international mechanisms. [4]

Secondly, Pakistan has established a National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF) for the implementation of international human rights conventions. Its Executive Committee has been notified, and the report describes the mechanism as functional in accordance with OHCHR guidelines. This provides a more structured basis for monitoring treaty obligations and coordinating government responses.

Third, Pakistan has taken several initiatives for the protection for vulnerable communities. For instance, the establishment of district-level human rights and interfaith harmony committees in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the creation of Meesaq Centres for minority protection and peaceful dispute resolution, and the establishment of a National Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals are some of the efforts undertaken in this regard. [5] These initiatives demonstrate a policy trajectory towards institutionalising rights protection, although their effectiveness and implementation can be debated.

5. LABOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBLE INDUSTRIALISATION: MAKING TRADE WORK FOR WORKERS

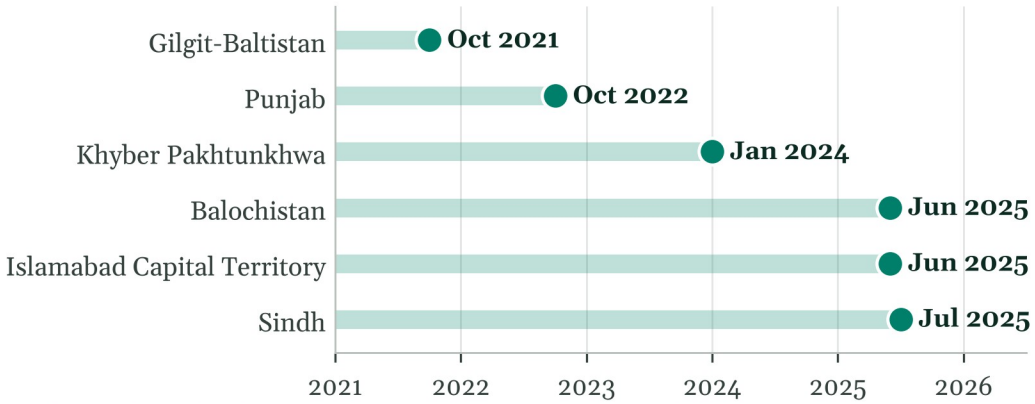
Labour rights are central to the credibility of Pakistan′s GSP+ case because the country′s principal export beneficiaries are labour-intensive industries. The relevant question is whether trade expansion is accompanied by improvements in workers′ rights, occupational safety, social protection and the elimination of exploitative employment practices.

Pakistan′s record contains challenges, particularly informal employment, child labour, bonded labour and uneven enforcement of provincial labour legislation. However, in recent years, Pakistan has taken several important reforms that deserve greater recognition. One important development is the completion and publication of child labour surveys across multiple jurisdictions. The report records surveys for Islamabad Capital Territory (June 2025), Sindh (July 2025), Balochistan (June 2025), Punjab (October 2022), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (January 2024) and Gilgit-Baltistan (October 2021). Action plans have also been notified or approved.

This matters because effective policymaking begins with reliable data. Without updated surveys, governments cannot identify the geographical concentration of child labour, distinguish hazardous from non-hazardous work or direct rehabilitation programmes towards the most vulnerable communities.

Figure 4: Completion of Child Labour Surveys by Jurisdiction

Survey completion month recorded for each jurisdiction



Source: GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025). Dates are the survey months recorded in the report.

Another important reform is the withdrawal of the exemption that had restricted the application of industrial relations legislation in Export Processing Zones. This allows workers in these zones to exercise freedom of association and collective bargaining rights. The reform directly addresses an important concern associated with export-oriented manufacturing. Furthermore, all provinces have developed Labour Inspection Management Systems and Labour Market Information Systems to

facilitate real-time, geo-tagged inspections. These systems can improve transparency, reduce arbitrary enforcement and generate more reliable compliance records. [7]

These initiatives demonstrate an important policy transition: from treating labour protection as a statutory obligation towards developing the administrative infrastructure necessary for enforcement. Nevertheless, the government should publish annual, province-wise data on inspections, violations detected, penalties imposed, compensation paid, union registrations and child labour rehabilitation outcomes. This would help convert legislative achievements into independently verifiable evidence of compliance. The EU should encourage this transition through continued technical assistance, capacity-building and trade engagement.

6. GOVERNANCE REFORMS

Governance is another area in which Pakistan′s reform trajectory deserves a balanced assessment. A particularly important achievement was Pakistan′s removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2022, following the completion of action plans addressing deficiencies in anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing frameworks. Pakistan was subsequently removed from the EU list of high-risk third countries in 2023.

This was not a merely symbolic achievement. It reflected improvements in regulatory coordination, financial oversight, institutional cooperation and the implementation of international standards. Besides it, Pakistan has taken a number of other intitatives that are worth mentioing. These include, the establishment of the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Authority under the 2023 legislation, the development of digital anti-corruption complaint-management mechanisms in Punjab, the establishment of the Pakistan Anti-Corruption Academy, the approval of the Whistleblower Protection and Vigilance Commission Bill 2025 by the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice, and the Digitalisation of anti-corruption case management and public complaint systems.[8]

Against these initiatives, Pakistan′s argument can be that governance reform is a continuing institutional process, not a binary condition. The FATF experience demonstrates that international monitoring, domestic institutional ownership and sustained implementation can produce measurable results.

7. CLIMATE RESILIENCE: WHY GSP+ MATTERS BEYOND TRADE

Climate change provides another compelling argument for continuing Pakistan's preferential access. Pakistan is among the countries most vulnerable to climate-related disasters despite contributing a comparatively small share of global greenhouse gas emissions. The 2022 floods exposed the country's vulnerability, destroying livelihoods, damaging infrastructure, displacing communities and creating long-term economic pressures. For Pakistan, environmental compliance is therefore not merely a matter of fulfilling international obligations. It is fundamentally linked to national economic security and sustainable development.

In recent years, Pakistan has undertaken several initiatives that demonstrate the country's commitment to strengthening climate resilience. These include the Living Indus Initiative, a flagship programme intended to restore the ecological health of the Indus Basin while promoting biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience. Climate Change Gender Action Plan is another initiative recognising women's participation and leadership in climate adaptation, particularly in agriculture, water, biodiversity, energy and disaster-risk management. In 2023, Pakistan devised the National Adaptation Plan. It is a comprehensive national framework for strengthening resilience across vulnerable sectors and mobilising adaptation finance. Additionally, in collaboration with UNDP, Pakistan initiated installation of early warning systems in 24 climate-vulnerable valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. [9]

Table 1: Summary of Pakistan's reform initiatives by GSP+ pillar

GSP+ pillar	Reform initiatives documented in the brief
Human rights	NCHR holds GANHRI A-status accreditation (Chairperson elected to the GANHRI Bureau); National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF) established; district human rights and interfaith harmony committees in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Meesaq Centres for minorities; National Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals.
Labour rights	Child labour surveys completed across jurisdictions, with action plans; exemption for Export Processing Zones withdrawn, restoring freedom of association and collective bargaining; provincial Labour Inspection Management Systems and Labour Market Information Systems (geo-tagged inspections).
Governance	Removed from FATF grey list (Oct 2022) and EU high-risk third-country list (2023); National AML/CFT Authority (2023 legislation); Pakistan Anti-Corruption Academy; digital anti-corruption complaint management in Punjab; Whistleblower Protection and Vigilance Commission Bill 2025 approved by Senate Standing Committee.
Climate and environment	Living Indus Initiative; Climate Change Gender Action Plan; National Adaptation Plan (2023); early warning systems in 24 climate-vulnerable valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (with UNDP).

Source: Government of Pakistan, GSP+ Pakistan Insights (2025); initiatives as described in Sections 4–7.

These initiatives demonstrate that Pakistan's environmental agenda extends beyond international reporting. It encompasses ecological restoration, climate adaptation, disaster preparedness, gender inclusion and green economic opportunities. The EU should recognise that maintaining GSP+ preferences can strengthen the economic capacity of Pakistani industries to invest in cleaner technologies, energy efficiency, environmental compliance and sustainable production. This is particularly important as European markets increasingly demand compliance with environmental and supply-chain standards. A constructive partnership can help Pakistani exporters adapt to these requirements rather than exclude them from European value chains.

8. CONSISTENCY, PROPORTIONALITY AND THE QUESTION OF SELECTIVE SCRUTINY

The European Union has every legitimate right to condition trade preferences on internationally recognised standards. Pakistan accepted these conditions voluntarily, and its obligations should be taken seriously. However, the credibility of a values-based trade policy also depends on consistency, objectivity and proportionality. The argument should not be that Pakistan's shortcomings are inconsequential because other countries have similar problems. Nor should Pakistan demand preferential treatment. Rather, it can insist that comparable standards of scrutiny be applied consistently across the EU's external economic relationships.

The EU's expanding economic engagement with India, including the India–EU Free Trade Agreement 2026, offers a relevant context for this discussion. India has faced sustained international scrutiny over religious freedom, minority protection, civil liberties and the treatment of dissent. These concerns have been documented by international human rights organisations and raised by European institutions. Freedom House now rates India "Partly Free" (62/100, down from 77 in 2014)[10], V-Dem classifies it as an "electoral autocracy", and RSF ranks it 157th of 180 for press freedom. In its 2026 Annual Report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) continued to recommend that India be designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). The European Parliament itself demanded in 2023 that human rights be integrated into all areas of the partnership, including trade. Yet the EU's economic engagement with India has continued.

Table 2: International Assessments of India's Human Rights Record

Indicator	Source	Reported assessment of India
Political rights and civil liberties	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026	"Partly Free": 62/100, down from 77 in 2014
Regime classification	V-Dem	"Electoral autocracy"
Press freedom	Reporters Without Borders (RSF)	Ranked 157th of 180 countries
Religious freedom	USCIRF 2026 Annual Report	Recommended for designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC)

Source: as cited in Section 8 (Freedom House, V-Dem, RSF and USCIRF).

This does not automatically establish a legal inconsistency. An FTA and GSP+ are different legal and institutional instruments, with different eligibility conditions. India is not a GSP+ beneficiary, and its trade relationship cannot be judged through precisely the same statutory mechanism. Nevertheless, a legitimate policy question arises: should human rights considerations be applied with comparable seriousness across the EU's broader external trade and partnership policies?

A credible European policy should avoid creating the impression that economic and strategic considerations determine the intensity of scrutiny while developing countries remain subject to

particularly demanding conditionality. The answer is not to lower human rights standards for Pakistan or any other country. It is to apply them across the board, to all countries, not just Pakistan.

The answer is not to lower human rights standards for Pakistan or any other country. It is to apply them across the board, to all countries, not just Pakistan.

There is also a compelling proportionality argument. Suspending trade preferences may affect the very workers, women, small businesses and vulnerable households whose economic and social empowerment the GSP+ arrangement is intended to advance. The objective should therefore be to improve compliance without undermining the economic foundations that make reform possible.

9. IN RESPONSE TO CARTWRIGHT WHITE PAPER

Among the voices calling for the suspension of Pakistan's GSP+ status, Gary Cartwright's is the most vociferous one. In September 2025, he wrote a white paper, *Assessment of Pakistan's Non-Compliance with GSP+ Obligations: A Case for Suspension under Regulation (EU) No 978/2012*. Gary's paper argues that Pakistan's deficiencies across human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and governance justify temporary withdrawal. Its central proposition is that formal ratification and legislative measures are insufficient without demonstrable enforcement [11]. This is an important principle. Fair Enough! However, the paper's assessment warrants closer examination for two reasons.

First, its treatment of reform appears insufficiently comprehensive. The paper relies substantially on the European Commission's 2023 assessment, covering the 2020–2022 monitoring period, alongside older treaty-body observations. While these are important sources, they cannot independently establish Pakistan's entire subsequent compliance trajectory. The 2025 *Pakistan Insights* report documents additional legislative, institutional and administrative developments that deserve assessment.

Second, it gives insufficient weight to the relationship between institutional reform and measurable outcomes. The establishment of labour inspection systems, child labour surveys, human rights reporting mechanisms, environmental policies and financial accountability structures should be evaluated against their actual implementation, rather than altogether disregarded because implementation remains incomplete.

The appropriate response is therefore not to dismiss criticism or challenge the legitimacy of independent monitoring. It is to place the criticism within a broader evidentiary framework, incorporating subsequent reforms, updated national data, independent verification and the government's continuing engagement with international institutions. A more credible assessment would distinguish between areas of genuine non-compliance, areas where progress has been made, and areas where further implementation is required.

10. WAY FORWARD FOR PAKISTAN

Pakistan should approach the new GSP framework from a position of strength, building on a decade of proactive engagement and reform. The transition period through the end of 2028 should be treated as an opportunity to showcase its measurable progress and secure approval under the new arrangement.

Figure 5: Pakistan's GSP+ Journey and the Road to the New Framework

Milestones from 2014 to the end of the transition period



Source: milestones as recorded in this brief; the 2027 and 2028 dates relate to the EU's new GSP framework and transition period.

Five priorities are particularly important.

1. Establish a GSP+ compliance scorecard: The Treaty Implementation Cell should publish quarterly progress reports against all 27 conventions, incorporating legislation, implementation indicators, budgetary allocations and independently verifiable outcomes.

2. Strengthen Human Rights Accountability: Publish updated statistics regarding enforced-disappearance, improve investigation and tracing mechanisms, strengthen minority protection and ensure accountability in cases of unlawful detention, violence and abuse.

3. Demonstrate Labour Rights through Data: Publish provincial inspection figures, prosecution outcomes, occupational safety records, child labour rehabilitation data and independent trade union registration statistics.

4. Accelerate Environmental Implementation: Strengthen environmental regulatory institutions, improve industrial wastewater treatment, expand clean-energy adoption and demonstrate implementation of the National Adaptation Plan.

5. Institutionalise Engagement with the EU: Establish regular technical consultations with the European Commission, EU member states, the ILO, UN treaty bodies and independent civil society organisations. Invite credible third-party verification of reported progress.

Table 4: Five Priorities at a Glance

#	Priority	Key deliverables
1	**Compliance scorecard**	Quarterly TIC reports against all 27 conventions: legislation, implementation indicators, budgetary allocations and independently verifiable outcomes.
2	**Human rights accountability**	Updated enforced-disappearance statistics; better investigation and tracing; stronger minority protection; accountability for unlawful detention, violence and abuse.
3	**Labour rights through data**	Provincial inspection figures, prosecution outcomes, occupational safety records, child labour rehabilitation data and trade union registration statistics.
4	**Environmental implementation**	Stronger regulators, improved industrial wastewater treatment, expanded clean energy and demonstrated delivery of the National Adaptation Plan.
5	**Institutionalised EU engagement**	Regular technical consultations with the Commission, member states, ILO, UN treaty bodies and civil society; credible third-party verification.

Source: Section 10 priorities, summarised.

Pakistan should also prepare a comprehensive application dossier that clearly distinguishes between completed reforms, ongoing initiatives and outstanding obligations. This will present Pakistan's record with the clarity and evidence that its progress deserves.

CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY IS AN INVESTMENT IN REFORM

The future of Pakistan′s GSP+ partnership should not be reduced to a contest between allegations of non-compliance and assertions of national progress. It should be understood through the broader development purpose of the arrangement. Over the past decade, preferential access has contributed to a 134 per cent increase in Pakistan′s exports to the EU, strengthened labour-intensive industries, expanded commercial opportunities and created an institutional framework for implementing international conventions. Pakistan has introduced reforms in human rights protection, labour regulation, environmental governance and financial accountability. These achievements do not eliminate the challenges that remain, but they demonstrate that the partnership has generated an important foundation for further progress.

The European Union must therefore recognise that trade preferences are not simply rewards for compliance; they are instruments through which compliance and sustainable development can be encouraged. Withdrawing them risks weakening the economic constituencies and institutional capacities necessary for reform. Continuing them, while strengthening monitoring and accountability, offers a more constructive and proportionate alternative.

Trade preferences are not simply rewards for compliance; they are instruments through which compliance and sustainable development can be encouraged.

Pakistan′s case is not that it has completed its compliance journey. It is that the journey has produced tangible results, that the institutional foundations for further progress are in place, and that the next phase of reform requires sustained partnership rather than economic disengagement. The new GSP framework should build upon a decade of shared economic gains and convert trade preferences into an even stronger instrument of sustainable development, social protection and mutual prosperity.

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