

# **Scorching Pakistan this year: the forgotten frontline of heatwave**

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**This summer, Pakistan isn't just hot—it's scorching. Across Sindh and Punjab, the mercury has crossed 49°C, placing cities like Jacobabad and Nawabshah among the hottest places on Earth.**

Urban residents suffer in what has become an annual crisis, but a more acute, quieter catastrophe is unfolding just beyond our city centers. In Pakistan's rapidly expanding peri-urban zones, millions endure deadly heatwaves without the most basic tools to survive.

Peri-urban areas—those sprawling, semi-formal settlements on the fringes of cities—are the hidden casualties of the climate crisis. These are the transitional zones where rural landscapes give way to unchecked urban sprawl. There live Pakistan's working poor: sanitation workers, rickshaw drivers, construction laborers, and domestic help. They build our homes, grow our food, clean our offices—but when the heat strikes, they are left to face it with nothing but wet rags, unreliable electricity, and hope.

This disparity is not accidental—it is institutional. Peri-urban areas fall into a policy vacuum. Too urban to qualify for rural development funds and too informal to be fully integrated into city governance, these communities are often invisible in the very plans meant to protect the public from climate hazards. Heatwave alerts, for example, are issued through formal media and official government channels. But many people in these zones lack access to consistent media, let alone digital early warning systems. As a result, they often don't even know a heat alert has been issued until it's too late.

Pakistan is among the top 10 countries most affected by climate change. The worsening heatwaves are not a surprise—they've been forecast for years. Scientists have warned that South Asia, and Pakistan in particular, will face more frequent and more intense episodes of extreme heat due to climate change. Yet every year, the same story repeats: temperatures soar, hospitals overflow, power fails, and lives are lost.

This year, the situation is exacerbated by ongoing economic strain and administrative limitations. The Pakistani government has issued heatwave advisories through the Pakistan Meteorological Department. Emergency cooling centers have been set up in some cities, and early school closures have been declared in provinces like Sindh and Punjab. But these actions are still reactive, limited in scale, and largely concentrated in urban cores. The problem isn't that authorities aren't responding—it's that they aren't responding where it matters most.

To date, there is no systematic strategy to address heat vulnerability in peri-urban areas, despite their rapid sprawl. Rural-to-urban migration, unaffordable housing in city centers, and informal settlement growth imply that more and more Pakistanis live in zones that are administratively undefined, physically underserved, and politically underrepresented, facing what urban planners call a “compounded vulnerability.” Homes are often built from tin, concrete blocks, or recycled materials, creating heat traps. Poor housing, lack of water access, limited healthcare, and inadequate sanitation make residents more susceptible to the health effects of heatwaves. Heatstroke, dehydration, and respiratory distress increase significantly among people who live in overcrowded, unventilated environments with no access to medical care. And yet, because these areas often lie outside municipal recordkeeping or census mapping, their suffering remains statistically invisible. It's time we stop treating heatwaves as one-size-fits-all crises. The reality is that while the climate may heat everyone equally, not everyone has an equal chance of survival.

Pakistan needs a differentiated, inclusive approach to heat preparedness. Here's where we must start with mapping vulnerability using satellite data, population density, and infrastructure surveys to identify high-risk peri-urban zones, extend Heat Action Plans Beyond the City Core, protect Outdoor Workers, invest in Passive Cooling and Green Infrastructure and should promote Community Awareness and Engagement.

These are not expensive interventions. They are basic rights. And with recent commitments from international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF to fund Pakistan's climate response, the resources are now available. If the government's climate narrative remains centered only on policy conferences and urban infrastructure, we will continue to fail the majority of those at risk. This heatwave is not the last—it is only a sign of what lies ahead.

It is time to stop asking whether we can afford to act—and start asking whether we can afford not to. The path to climate resilience does not run through air-conditioned offices. It runs through the slums, the outskirts, and the sweat of Pakistan's working poor. It is there—in the dusty streets of our peri-urban neighborhoods—that the real frontlines of the climate crisis are drawn. If Pakistan is to survive the rising heat, then our policies must reach where the heat hits hardest.

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