

Economic Pressures and Welfare Deficits in Faisalabad's Labour Colonies: The Role of Unions and Social Protections

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ABSTRACT

Faisalabad, Pakistan's leading textile and industrial centre, accommodates thousands of low-wage workers in eight government-established labour colonies created in 1976 under the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971. These colonies five in East Faisalabad and three in West Faisalabad provide rent-free housing allocated through lottery to registered employees, with no fixed occupancy duration during employment (though families must vacate six months after a worker's death). Despite this provision, residents face severe welfare deficits and economic pressures. Housing units are dilapidated with leaking roofs, cracked walls, poor ventilation and overcrowding; basic utilities are unreliable intermittent clean water, frequent electricity load-shedding, nighttime gas cut-offs, inadequate sanitation leading to sewage overflow and flooding, broken roads, unmanaged garbage and poor drainage. On-site healthcare and quality schools are virtually absent, commutes to workplaces are long and costly and proximity to industrial zones exposes residents to pollution-related health risks. Economic insecurity is acute: low and irregular wages, job instability, high living costs and minimal access to social protections (health insurance, pensions, EOBI benefits, provident funds) particularly affect informal and contract workers. No government grants support colony maintenance and bureaucratic delays hinder repairs. No registered unions exist within the colonies themselves; governance is centralized under the Director Labour Welfare (East) and (West). However, Faisalabad's broader trade unions consistently advocate for residents' rights, better wages, improved living conditions and enforcement of labour laws. This study examines how these intersecting economic pressures and welfare deficits perpetuate vulnerability and inequality among industrial workers, highlighting the constrained yet important role of trade unions and the urgent need for strengthened social protection mechanisms and policy reforms.

Keywords: *Faisalabad labour colonies, textile workers, economic pressures, welfare deficits, trade unions Pakistan.*

INTRODUCTION

This introduction provides essential context on Faisalabad's government labour colonies, traces their historical establishment and governance structure under the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, describes the severe infrastructural, utility, and service deficits currently faced by residents, and explains the significance of investigating these conditions alongside the role of trade unions and gaps in social protections.

Faisalabad, widely known as the "Manchester of Pakistan," stands as the country's premier textile hub, with its economy heavily reliant on textile, power loom and garment industries. The city is bisected by the

main railway track into East and West Faisalabad. To house the vast industrial workforce, the Punjab government established labour colonies under the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, with allotments beginning in 1976.

Today, eight government-managed colonies exist: five in East Faisalabad (512 Multi-Story Labour Colony Flats on Susan Road/Kohinoor Flats, Tipu Sultan Labour Colony in Khurrianwala, Muhammad Bin Qasim Labour Colony on Sheikhpura Road, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan Labour Colony on Jaranwala Road and II Chundrigar Labour Colony near Hussain Sugar Mills) and three in West Faisalabad (Kaleem Shaheed Labour Colony on Narwala Road, Johar Labour Colony in Haji Abad on Sheikhpura Road and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy Labour Colony in Chanchal Singh Wala on Jhang Road). These colonies were meant to offer rent-free accommodation to registered industrial workers and families via a transparent process of newspaper ads, labour department applications and lottery allocation.

Governance remains centralized, with the Director Labour Welfare (East) overseeing the eastern colonies and the Director Labour Welfare (West) managing the western ones. Occupancy is indefinite during the worker's employment or lifetime, with no rent charged, though families must vacate within six months of the worker's death. No regular government funding supports maintenance (Field, 2016).

Intended as affordable housing, these colonies now face severe infrastructural decay and welfare deficits. Units suffer from leaking roofs, cracked walls, poor ventilation and urgent repairs, while overcrowding creates cramped, privacy-lacking conditions and strains shared facilities. Utilities are unreliable intermittent or contaminated water, frequent load-shedding, nighttime gas cuts, inadequate sanitation causing open drains, sewage overflow, stagnant water and monsoon flooding alongside broken roads, neglected pavements, unmanaged garbage and impassable streets in rains. Security is weak due to poor lighting, absent boundary walls, limited policing and rising antisocial activities. On-site healthcare is absent, forcing long travels for care; quality schools are distant, fueling high dropouts and low literacy; colonies are often far from workplaces, entailing costly, exhausting commutes; and industrial proximity brings pollution-linked respiratory issues, fatigue and disease outbreaks (Ahmad, 2009).

These physical woes are worsened by acute economic pressures wages frequently below minimum, delayed payments, job insecurity, excessive hours, inflation-driven living costs and precarious informal/contract work that blocks access to social protections like health insurance, pensions, EOBI registration, provident funds and maternity benefits. No registered trade unions function within the colonies or under the Directors Labour Welfare/Registrar of Trade Unions Faisalabad, yet broader Faisalabad-based unions actively advocate for residents' rights, highlighting living conditions, wages and labour law enforcement.

This study is significant as it illuminates the lived struggles of textile workers in these colonies amid Pakistan's industrial and economic crises, including factory closures, layoffs and export slumps that deepen poverty and vulnerability. By documenting infrastructural failures, utility shortages, health/education gaps and limited protections while assessing compliance with constitutional and international labour standards it exposes how the lack of on-site unions and reliance on external advocacy perpetuates inequality. The research informs policy on labour welfare, urban planning and social security in industrial hubs, urging reforms by government, labour departments, unions and civil society to uplift living standards, curb inequality and restore worker dignity in Faisalabad, a key driver of national economy (Kalra, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines existing scholarship and policy discussions on labour colonies in urban Pakistan, the historical and contemporary advocacy functions of trade unions in the industrial sector

(particularly textiles), the framework and limitations of social protection mechanisms for workers, and the specific research gaps that this study seeks to address with respect to Faisalabad's government-managed colonies.

Labour Colonies in Urban Pakistan

Labour colonies in urban Pakistan represent a long-standing policy effort to provide subsidized or rent-free housing for industrial workers, particularly in manufacturing hubs where rapid industrialization has drawn large migrant labour forces from rural areas. These colonies originated from colonial-era canal colonization projects in Punjab, which transformed barren lands into agricultural and later industrial zones, with Faisalabad (formerly Lyallpur) emerging as a key planned city in the late 19th century under British irrigation schemes.

Post-independence, the focus shifted to welfare housing for factory workers amid growing textile and power loom sectors. The Workers Welfare Fund Ordinance, 1971, formalized this by establishing mechanisms for constructing residential colonies, funded through employer contributions, to offer low-cost accommodation, education and health facilities. In Faisalabad, allotments for such colonies were made in 1976, resulting in eight government-managed colonies five in East Faisalabad and three in West Faisalabad intended to house textile and industrial workers without rent charges. Allocation occurs through public advertisements, labour department registration and lottery systems, with no fixed occupancy duration during employment, though families must vacate six months after a worker's death (Mustafa, 2001).

Governance remains centralized under regional Directors Labour Welfare (East and West), without separate heads per colony or dedicated government grants for maintenance. Despite their purpose, these colonies face persistent challenges: dilapidated structures with leaking roofs, cracked walls, poor ventilation and overcrowding; unreliable utilities including intermittent clean water, frequent electricity outages, nighttime gas cut-offs, inadequate sanitation causing sewage overflow and flooding; broken roads, unmanaged garbage, poor drainage and vulnerability to monsoon hazards. Far-flung locations impose long commutes, while proximity to industrial zones heightens pollution-related health risks like respiratory issues. No on-site clinics or quality schools exist, leading to travel burdens for healthcare and high child dropout rates. Security remains weak due to poor lighting and limited policing. These conditions reflect broader urban Pakistan trends where labour housing initiatives, though well-intentioned, suffer from underfunding, bureaucratic delays and neglect, perpetuating substandard living amid rapid urbanization and industrial growth (Zafar, 2017).

Role of Unions in Labour Welfare

Trade unions in Pakistan have historically served as advocates for worker rights, collective bargaining and welfare improvements, though their influence in the informal and textile sectors dominant in Faisalabad remains limited by structural barriers. In the textile industry, unions have pushed for minimum wages, safer workplaces, timely payments and social security access, often through strikes and negotiations. In Faisalabad, organizations like the Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM), formed in the early 2000s, have organized power loom workers against exploitation, securing periodic wage adjustments via tripartite talks involving owners and administration.

Unions highlight issues like excessive hours, unsafe conditions and lack of protections, while resisting employer tactics such as short-term contracts, union-busting and fake pro-management unions. Despite successes in some bargaining rounds, unionization faces suppression: low membership (often below 10% in textiles), fear of retaliation including dismissals, weak enforcement of labour laws and exclusion of informal/contract workers from legal definitions of "worker." In government labour colonies, no

registered unions exist within the colonies or under labour welfare directors/registrars, leaving residents without direct on-site representation for housing-specific grievances (Rahman, 2012).

Broader Faisalabad trade unions, however, consistently raise voices for colony residents' welfare, advocating better living conditions, wage enforcement and access to benefits. This external advocacy remains vital but constrained, as unions struggle against employer resistance, historical state suppression and the informal sector's vast scale. Overall, unions play a critical but uneven role in amplifying worker demands, bridging gaps in policy implementation and pushing for systemic changes in welfare, though their effectiveness is hampered by low density and anti-union practices in Pakistan's industrial landscape (Jan, 2023).

Social Protections and Policy Frameworks

Social protection frameworks in Pakistan aim to safeguard workers against economic risks through contributory schemes like pensions, health insurance and injury benefits, yet coverage remains severely limited, especially for informal and low-wage industrial workers. Key laws include the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) Act, 1976, providing pensions for private-sector employees; provincial Employees Social Security Ordinances offering medical and injury coverage; and the Workers Welfare Fund Ordinance, 1971, supporting housing, education and health initiatives via employer levies (Ann McDougall, 2017).

These mechanisms target formal workers, requiring employer registration and contributions, but informal and contract-based employment prevalent in Faisalabad's textile and power loom sectors excludes most labourers from benefits like EOBI pensions, provident funds, maternity allowances, or health insurance. In labour colonies, residents face minimal access to these protections, compounded by low wages, irregular payments, job insecurity and high living costs that trap families in poverty cycles. Policy implementation gaps arise from weak enforcement, low registration rates (EOBI covers only a fraction of the workforce), bureaucratic hurdles and exclusion of informal workers who constitute the majority (Cohen, 2023).

Broader challenges include underfunding of welfare boards, lack of grants for colony maintenance and failure to extend protections universally. Recent discussions emphasize expanding voluntary or hybrid schemes for informal workers, linking registration to national IDs and integrating micro-pensions or targeted assistance. However, deficits persist: no on-site healthcare or education facilities in colonies, pollution-related health burdens and reliance on distant services. This misalignment between policy intent and ground realities underscores the need for reforms to include informal workers, strengthen enforcement and align protections with constitutional commitments to social security and decent living standards (Anderson, 2009).

RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers adopted qualitative, desk-based, doctrinal, and documentary approach adopted for the study, detailing the research design, exclusive reliance on official documentary sources (principally the responses from the Head of Labour Colonies Branch), purposive data selection, and thematic content analysis method used to interpret the evidence.

Research Design

This study adopts a purely qualitative research design utilizing a doctrinal and descriptive case-study approach. The methodology centres on in-depth textual interpretation and critical examination of official documentary records and policy documents to investigate economic pressures, welfare deficits and the role of unions and social protections in Faisalabad's government labour colonies. The eight colonies are

treated as a single bounded case embedded within the wider industrial and labour welfare framework of Faisalabad. This design enables a contextual, systemic analysis of structural issues, governance mechanisms, living conditions and institutional responses without any primary data generation through interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations, or fieldwork. The approach is entirely desk-based, interpretive and reliant on authoritative secondary and official sources.

Data Collection Method

Data collection is conducted exclusively through desk-based review of official documentary sources. The core dataset comprises the complete set of written responses provided by the Head of Labour Colonies Branch, Faisalabad, which systematically address colony establishment, geographical division, number and names of colonies, allocation procedures, occupancy rules, rent policy, governance structure, absence of internal unions, lack of maintenance grants and an exhaustive enumeration of infrastructural, utility, health, education, security, commute, pollution and economic challenges. Supplementary sources include the full text of the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971 and any associated administrative guidelines or labour department notifications. No human subjects are contacted, no field visits are undertaken and no new data is collected beyond the already-provided official documentary record.

Sample Size

In this documentary study, the “sample” consists of the entire corpus of official responses from the Head of Labour Colonies Branch covering all eight government labour colonies (five in East Faisalabad and three in West Faisalabad), together with the complete legal text of the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971 and relevant administrative rules. The dataset is comprehensive rather than sampled in a statistical sense; the full authoritative record forms the sole basis of analysis.

The official responses from the Head of Labour Colonies Branch are deliberately selected as the primary and most authoritative source because they provide direct, reliable and detailed coverage of all structural, procedural, infrastructural and welfare-related dimensions of the colonies (Austin, 2010). The Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971 and related guidelines are purposively included as foundational legal documents that establish the policy intent and framework. No random or probability-based selection occurs; the choice is driven by relevance, specificity and official credibility.

Data Collection

Data collection is non-interactive and confined to desk-based compilation. It involves careful organization and annotation of the official written responses from the Head of Labour Colonies Branch, which detail colony geography (East and West Faisalabad divided by railway track), historical establishment (allotments in 1976), the list and locations of the eight colonies, centralized governance (Director Labour Welfare East and West), rent-free policy, allocation via advertisement-application-lottery, indefinite occupancy during employment with post-death eviction rule, absence of colony-level unions, no maintenance grants and the full range of reported challenges (dilapidated housing, overcrowding, utility failures, sanitation problems, security issues, distant commutes, pollution health risks, service gaps, economic pressures and governance limitations). The Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, is reviewed as the constitutive legal instrument. No additional data sources are generated or consulted beyond these official documents.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis is applied following an iterative, interpretive process suitable for qualitative documentary research. The official responses and legal texts are read repeatedly to identify, code and categorize recurring themes: infrastructural decay (housing, sanitation, roads, drainage), utility failures

(water, electricity, gas), service deficiencies (healthcare, education, security), economic pressures (low wages, irregular payments, job insecurity, high costs), limited social protection access, centralized governance constraints, absence of internal unions and external trade union advocacy (Breman, 2015). Themes are synthesized into broader patterns welfare deficits, economic precarity, institutional and policy gaps and critically interpreted against the original intent of the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971. Analysis remains descriptive and interpretive, supported by direct quotations from the official responses where relevant, with no statistical procedures or quantification. This method ensures findings are evidence-based, contextually grounded and aligned with the documentary nature of the study, leading to clear conclusions and targeted recommendations.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF UNIONS AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

This section presents the core findings derived directly from official documentary records and analyses the interconnected dimensions of infrastructural decay and welfare deficits, the nature and intensity of economic pressures on residents, the absence of internal unions combined with the role of external trade union advocacy, and the critical policy and social protection gaps revealed in Faisalabad's labour colonies.

Economic Pressures and Welfare Deficits

Official records and responses confirm that the eight government labour colonies in Faisalabad, established following the 1976 allotments under the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, continue to provide rent-free accommodation to registered textile and power loom workers through a structured yet bureaucratic process. This involves newspaper advertisements, labour department registration, and lottery allocation. Occupancy remains indefinite during the worker's employment or lifetime, with no rent charged, although families must vacate within six months of the worker's death a rule that introduces significant insecurity for dependents.

Centralized governance under the Director Labour Welfare (East) for the five eastern colonies and the Director Labour Welfare (West) for the three western ones, without dedicated per-colony heads or any consistent annual maintenance grants from the government, has led to prolonged and systemic neglect. This administrative model, while intended for efficiency, has instead fostered inertia and delayed responses to resident needs.

Housing units are in advanced states of disrepair, with leaking roofs, cracked walls, inadequate ventilation, and severe overcrowding that results in cramped living conditions, lack of privacy, and overburdened shared facilities such as toilets and kitchens. Utility services remain chronically unreliable: clean drinking water is irregular or entirely absent in many areas, forcing reliance on potentially contaminated sources that contribute to waterborne diseases. Electricity suffers from frequent load-shedding and prolonged outages, gas supply is often discontinued at night, and sanitation infrastructure is grossly inadequate, leading to open drains, sewage overflow, stagnant water pools, and recurrent monsoon flooding that renders entire streets impassable and heightens health risks.

Roads and pavements are broken and potholed, garbage collection is virtually nonexistent (leading to piles of waste that attract vectors), and drainage systems remain poor. Security is compromised by insufficient street lighting, missing or dilapidated boundary walls, limited policing presence, and rising incidents of antisocial activities, including theft and drug-related issues. The near-total absence of on-site healthcare facilities compels residents to undertake long, costly journeys for even basic medical care, while quality schools are scarce or distant, contributing to elevated child dropout rates, persistently low literacy levels, and limited intergenerational mobility.

Many colonies are located far from industrial workplaces, imposing long, expensive, and physically exhausting daily commutes on workers who often travel by overcrowded public transport or on foot. Proximity to industrial zones further exposes residents to heavy air and noise pollution from textile mills and power looms, resulting in widespread respiratory problems, chronic fatigue, skin conditions, and recurrent disease outbreaks, particularly among children and the elderly.

These physical, infrastructural, and service-related deficits are intensified by acute economic pressures on resident families: wages frequently fall below the legal minimum, payments are irregular or delayed, job insecurity is pervasive due to seasonal fluctuations and employer discretion, excessive working hours are common, and sharply rising living costs driven by inflation in food, fuel, and utilities erode purchasing power. The dominance of informal and contract-based employment in Faisalabad's textile and power loom sectors severely restricts access to essential social protections, including health insurance, pensions, EOBI registration, provident funds, maternity benefits, and injury compensation. This exclusion perpetuates deep vulnerability, intergenerational poverty cycles, and a fundamental failure to fulfill the welfare objectives originally enshrined in the 1971 Ordinance.

Role of Unions in Promoting Welfare

No registered trade unions exist within any of the eight labour colonies or fall under the supervision of the Directors Labour Welfare or the Registrar of Trade Unions Faisalabad. This complete absence deprives residents of internal, colony-specific collective mechanisms to directly address grievances related to housing maintenance, utility failures, sanitation, security, healthcare access, education, or other service shortfalls. The centralized administrative structure further constrains localized resident advocacy and responsiveness, leaving communities reliant on sporadic external interventions.

Nevertheless, broader trade unions operating across Faisalabad continue to perform an important external advocacy role on behalf of colony residents. Through public statements, negotiations, rallies, media outreach, and sustained campaigns, these unions including groups like the Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM) and affiliated federations repeatedly highlight the dilapidated housing conditions, unreliable utilities, pollution-induced health risks, burdensome commutes, low wages, delayed payments, and inadequate social protections. Recent mobilizations, such as the large-scale protests in 2025 by thousands of power loom and textile workers in Faisalabad, have demanded implementation of the legal minimum wage, mandatory social security registration, factory safety overhauls, abolition of exploitative practices, and formal union recognition. These efforts have occasionally drawn policy attention, contributing to limited sector-level wage adjustments, temporary relief measures, or court interventions declaring certain employer lockouts illegal.

However, the overall impact remains constrained by the lack of colony-level union presence, weak institutional linkages between workplaces and residential colonies, historical suppression of union activity, strong employer resistance (including union-busting tactics like dismissals for organizing), and persistently low union density, particularly in the large informal segment of the textile industry. External union efforts, while essential and increasingly visible amid ongoing economic pressures, are thus only partially effective in translating resident concerns into structural, long-term change.

Policy and Social Protection Gaps and Implications

The Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, was designed to ensure decent housing and comprehensive welfare for industrial workers through employer contributions and government oversight. Yet, stark implementation failures persist: the absence of dedicated annual government grants for maintenance, prolonged bureaucratic delays in repairs due to centralized decision-making, and the six-month post-death eviction rule create acute family insecurity and deter long-term residency stability. Access to social

protections remains severely limited, with minimal EOBI registration, pensions, health insurance, or provident funds available especially for the large proportion of informal and contract-based workers exacerbating economic precarity and health risks.

Current policy frameworks fail to meaningfully integrate workplace vulnerabilities (low wages, informality, job insecurity) with residential welfare needs, leaving critical gaps in on-site healthcare, quality education, reliable utilities, pollution mitigation, security provision, and transport support. These deficiencies stem from systemic underfunding, weak labour law enforcement, exclusion of the informal sector from protections, poor coordination between housing, labour, and urban planning authorities, and historical challenges in union facilitation. While the centralized governance model offers administrative simplicity, it severely restricts localized responsiveness and timely intervention.

The findings therefore carry clear and urgent implications for labour welfare reform. Dedicated annual ring-fenced budgets must be allocated to each colony to finance urgent structural renovations (roofs, walls, ventilation), utility upgrades (consistent clean water via filtration plants, reliable electricity through solar/back-up systems, stable gas supply), modern sanitation and drainage to prevent flooding, road/pavement repairs, garbage management systems, enhanced street lighting, and boundary wall construction. Decentralization of administration through appointment of dedicated colony supervisors or empowered resident oversight committees would reduce delays and improve accountability to local needs.

Universal extension of social protection coverage, irrespective of formal or informal employment status, should be prioritized via simplified, on-site EOBI registration drives, micro-health insurance schemes (subsidized by government or employer levies), pensions, and provident funds. Employers must face stricter obligations and penalties to ensure worker registration, regular contribution remittance, minimum wage compliance, timely digital wage payments, transport subsidies or shuttle services to ease commutes, and job security provisions.

Pollution mitigation requires immediate measures such as tree planting around colonies, distribution of protective gear (masks, etc.), regular health awareness campaigns on respiratory risks, and feasibility studies for potential relocation away from industrial zones. On-site health camps (in partnership with NGOs and hospitals) for primary care, vaccinations, and check-ups, alongside educational support programs (after-school coaching, scholarships, NGO learning centres) to reduce dropouts and improve literacy, would directly address health and human capital deficits.

Encouraging formation of resident welfare associations and community-led initiatives such as clean-up drives, water filtration projects, and monitoring of maintenance should receive administrative recognition and modest financial support to promote self-help and bridge public service gaps.

The persistent absence of internal unions underscores the need for proactive legal and administrative facilitation of colony-level worker organizations or resident associations under existing labour laws, including simplified registration processes, awareness sessions on union rights, and safeguards against retaliation. Formal coordination mechanisms between these emerging internal groups and established Faisalabad trade unions via regular meetings, joint campaigns, and capacity-building would strengthen advocacy on housing-specific issues and amplify demands through tripartite dialogues involving government, employers, and labour welfare boards.

Ultimately, these implications point to the necessity of a comprehensive review and amendment of the 1971 Ordinance to incorporate mandatory annual maintenance funding, provisions for resident participation in governance, universal social protection extension, stronger enforcement mechanisms (including penalties for non-compliance), and better integration of colony welfare with contemporary

economic realities, informal sector dynamics, urban-industrial pressures, and recent provincial efforts (such as expanded worker housing initiatives) in Faisalabad. Such reforms are essential to transform these colonies from symbols of neglect into models of dignified living for industrial workers.

CONCLUSION

This concluding section synthesizes the study's principal findings, offers final observations on the persistent challenges confronting residents of Faisalabad's labour colonies, reflects on their implications for labour welfare policy in the context of ongoing economic and social pressures, and identifies key directions for future research to advance more effective, equitable, and sustainable solutions.

This study has meticulously documented the persistent, interconnected, and severe challenges faced by residents of Faisalabad's eight government labour colonies. Established in 1976 under the Workers Welfare Ordinance, 1971, these colonies were intended to provide secure, rent-free housing for industrial workers, primarily in the textile and power loom sectors, through a transparent allocation process involving newspaper advertisements, labour department registration, and lottery selection. No rent is charged, and occupancy continues indefinitely during the worker's employment or lifetime, although families must vacate within six months following a worker's death a provision that introduces profound insecurity for surviving dependents and perpetuates vulnerability across generations.

Centralized governance under the Director Labour Welfare (East) for the five eastern colonies and the Director Labour Welfare (West) for the three western ones, without dedicated per-colony heads or consistent annual maintenance grants from the government, has directly contributed to widespread infrastructural decay and chronic service failures. Housing units remain dilapidated, characterized by leaking roofs, cracked walls, inadequate ventilation, and severe overcrowding that eliminates privacy, strains shared facilities such as toilets and kitchens, and exacerbates health and social issues. Utilities are chronically unreliable: clean drinking water is irregular or entirely absent in many areas, forcing reliance on contaminated sources; electricity is plagued by frequent load-shedding and prolonged outages; gas supply is often discontinued at night; sanitation systems are inadequate, leading to open drains, sewage overflow, stagnant water, and recurrent monsoon flooding that renders streets impassable and heightens risks of waterborne diseases.

Roads and pavements are broken and potholed, garbage collection is virtually nonexistent (resulting in accumulating waste and vector-borne threats), and drainage remains poor. Security is compromised by insufficient street lighting, missing or dilapidated boundary walls, limited policing presence, and rising incidents of antisocial activities. The near-total absence of on-site healthcare clinics compels residents to undertake long, costly journeys for even basic medical attention, while quality schools are scarce or distant, contributing to elevated child dropout rates, persistently low literacy levels, and constrained opportunities for intergenerational upward mobility.

These physical and service-related deficits are further compounded by acute economic pressures: wages frequently fall below the legal minimum (with recent reports indicating widespread non-compliance even with the announced PKR 40,000 threshold), payments are irregular or delayed, job insecurity is pervasive amid seasonal fluctuations and employer discretion, excessive working hours dominate daily life, and inflation-driven escalations in living costs particularly for food, fuel, and utilities erode household resilience and trap families in deepening poverty cycles. Access to essential social protections, including health insurance, pensions, EOBI registration, provident funds, maternity benefits, and injury compensation, remains minimal, especially for the large proportion of informal and contract-based workers who form the backbone of Faisalabad's textile industry. The dominance of precarious employment structures severely limits these entitlements, undermining the very welfare objectives enshrined in the 1971 Ordinance.

No registered trade unions operate within the colonies themselves, depriving residents of direct, colony-specific collective mechanisms to address housing maintenance, utility failures, sanitation, security, healthcare, education, or other localized grievances. The centralized administrative framework further impedes responsive advocacy. Nevertheless, broader Faisalabad trade unions and labour movements continue to play a vital external advocacy role. Through sustained protests, rallies, media campaigns, and negotiations evident in major mobilizations during 2025, including large-scale strikes by power loom and textile workers demanding minimum wage enforcement, social security registration, factory safety improvements, and abolition of exploitative practices these unions have highlighted dilapidated conditions, pollution-related health risks, burdensome commutes, low wages, and inadequate protections. While such efforts have occasionally secured limited concessions, such as written commitments to wage enforcement or temporary relief, their impact remains constrained by low union density (particularly in the informal sector), strong employer resistance (including union-busting tactics like dismissals), historical suppression of organizing, police repression, and weak linkages between workplace and residential issues.

Recent developments, including ongoing worker protests in Faisalabad amid industrial closures, security concerns, and policy uncertainties, underscore the urgency of these challenges. The colonies stand as stark symbols of unfulfilled promises, where the original intent of dignified housing and welfare has been eroded by systemic neglect, underfunding, and exclusion of informal workers from protections.

While firmly grounded in official documentary sources, this study opens several promising and urgent avenues for future inquiry. Longitudinal research tracking changes in colony conditions particularly following any maintenance interventions, funding increases, policy shifts, or initiatives like Punjab's workers' housing schemes could rigorously evaluate reform effectiveness, identify barriers to implementation, and highlight emerging challenges amid accelerated industrialization, economic volatility, and climate-related pressures such as intensified monsoon flooding, urban heat stress, and water scarcity.

Comparative studies of labour colonies and worker housing in other major Pakistani industrial centres (e.g., Karachi, Lahore, Sialkot, or Gujranwala) would illuminate regional variations in governance models, funding allocation, enforcement mechanisms, and welfare outcomes, potentially informing national harmonization efforts and best-practice transfer. In-depth qualitative research incorporating direct resident perspectives through interviews, focus groups, participatory action methods, or ethnographic approaches could capture nuanced lived experiences of economic precarity, health consequences from pollution and poor sanitation, daily struggles with unreliable services, intergenerational impacts, and perceptions of external union advocacy that official records often under-represent.

Specific investigations into the structural and legal barriers preventing colony-level union registration and organizing, alongside analyses of the advocacy strategies, achievements, and limitations of external Faisalabad trade unions in representing residential concerns, would deepen understanding of collective action dynamics within state-provided industrial housing. Further exploration of the feasibility, design, and potential impacts of community-based solutions such as resident welfare associations, cooperatives for shared services, NGO partnerships for on-site health/education programs, or micro-initiatives addressing overcrowding and dropout rates could identify grassroots pathways to bridge public service gaps and foster self-reliance.

Research examining the intersection of climate change vulnerabilities (e.g., more severe flooding, heatwaves, and resource scarcity) with existing colony deficits would support the development of climate-resilient housing designs, pollution mitigation strategies (including potential phased industrial relocation away from residential zones), and adaptive urban planning. Finally, rigorous policy-oriented analyses assessing the cost-benefit ratios of decentralizing governance (e.g., appointing colony supervisors or

resident committees), establishing dedicated ring-fenced annual maintenance budgets, extending universal social protections to informal workers through simplified registration drives, and strengthening enforcement against non-compliant employers could generate concrete, evidence-based recommendations for labour welfare boards, provincial governments, and national policymakers.

Ultimately, addressing these entrenched issues demands a comprehensive overhaul: amending the 1971 Ordinance (or its provincial successors) to mandate annual funding, resident participation in governance, universal protections, and stronger accountability mechanisms. Only through such integrated reforms can Faisalabad's labour colonies evolve from sites of neglect into models of equitable, dignified, and sustainable living for the industrial workforce that sustains the city's economy.

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