

The Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) in Pakistan: Legal Commitment's Evaluation, Governance Framework and Enforcement Gaps

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a core milestone in modern development policy as it connects economic progress with equality, justice, and fairness. It promotes development that benefits not only the present generation but also protects opportunities for future generations. Sustainable development should not be viewed merely as economic growth or material advancement; rather, it requires a model of progress that is inclusive, equitable, accountable, and socially balanced. Against this backdrop sustainable development is not a secondary social objective but a central condition for meaningful development, particularly in Pakistan, where gender inequality continues to affect access to justice, institutional participation, economic opportunity, and social protection. The sustainable development goal 5 (gender equality) strengthens the rule of law, improves institutional legitimacy, expands human capital, and supports inclusive economic growth. This article argues that the challenges surrounding SDG 5 in Pakistan do not arise only from the absence of legal recognition, but more significantly from weak governance, ineffective enforcement, fragmented institutional coordination, social resistance, and limited monitoring mechanisms. It first examines the major gender equality gaps experienced in Pakistan, and then analyzes the country's legal and policy commitments, governance arrangements, enforcement weaknesses, and accountability limitations. The article maintains that symbolic reforms, although important, are not sufficient to achieve substantive gender equality unless they are supported by practical implementation measures. For SDG 5 to become meaningful in Pakistan, there is a need for safe reporting mechanisms, better institutional coordination, gender responsive budgeting, reliable data systems, women's participation in decision making, and effective protection services. The article concludes by emphasizing that Pakistan must move beyond symbolic commitments and adopt a more pragmatic and sustainable approach to implement SDG 5.

Keywords: SGD5; Gender Equality; Legal Frameworks; Enforcement Deficits; Symbolic Reforms; Substantial Compliance

I. INTRODUCTION

A time of challenges and opportunities the twin challenges of building pathways to sustainable development and enhancing gender equality have never been more pressing. As the world embraces and begins to implement Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 era, this paper shows why each is so important, but also why they must be addressed together in ways that fully embrace the politics of gender and of sustainability.¹ Gender equality is universally recognized as a foundational pillar of sustainable development whereas sustainable development goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by eliminating discrimination, violence, and structural barriers. Pakistan, as a signatory to the 2030 Agenda

¹ Interview with Salman Farooq, Human Right Commission of Pakistan, Interview taken on 4th April 2026.

for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations, has committed itself to implementing SDG 5 through legislative, institutional, and policy reforms.²

However, despite these commitments, Pakistan continues to rank poorly on global gender indices, reflecting persistent disparities in education, employment, political participation, access to justice, and protection from violence. This contradiction between normative legal commitments and lived realities raises critical questions regarding governance capacity, institutional effectiveness, and enforcement mechanisms. This research situates SDG 5 within Pakistan's legal and governance landscape to critically evaluate why gender equality remains elusive despite an expanding body of laws and policies.³

Pakistan's legal framework, particularly the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 Article 25⁴, guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. The Article 34 also provides that "measures shall be taken for achieving the full participation of women in all spheres of national life".⁵ Over the past two decades, Pakistan has enacted several gender specific laws addressing domestic violence, workplace harassment, inheritance rights, and honor based crimes. Additionally, Pakistan is a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), reinforcing its international obligations toward gender equality.⁶ In order to implement these commitments various governance structures such as the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), provincial women development departments, and ombudsperson offices were established to oversee gender equality initiatives. Despite these developments, enforcement remains weak due to fragmented institutional coordination, lack of political will, socio cultural resistance, and limited accountability mechanisms.

The research problem addressed in this study is the persistent gap between Pakistan's formal commitments to SDG 5 and the actual condition of gender equality in the country. Although Pakistan has constitutional protections, women related legislation, policy frameworks, and international obligations such as CEDAW and the 2030 Agenda, women and girls continue to face violence, low labour-force participation, weak protection services, limited decision-making power, and poor institutional support. Pakistan's low ranking in the global gender gap report 2025, along with high levels of violence against women and low female economic participation, shows that the problem is not merely the absence of laws, but the weak implementation, monitoring, enforcement, and accountability of existing commitments.⁷ Therefore, this research examines how symbolic legal and policy compliance has failed to produce substantive gender equality outcomes in Pakistan. Therefore the study aims to elucidate pathways from symbolic compliance and reforms to substantial implementation which aims to the effective and practical execution of legal, constitutional, policy, and international commitments in a manner that produces measurable improvements in gender equality outcomes and this would require not only the adoption of gender-related laws and policies, but also their enforcement through strong institutions, monitoring, accountability, protection services, and access to justice.

The object of this study is to examine how SDG 5 can be moved from a limited welfare domain to the core of Pakistan's development policy. Moreover it aims to explain how gender equality should not only be treated only as a matter of women's protection, social welfare, or legal recognition, but as an essential condition for national development, economic growth, justice, good governance, and sustainable progress.

The study further aims to address the challenges Pakistan faces in achieving SDG 5 by identifying the gap between formal legal commitments and substantive gender justice. It focuses on the role of governance failures, weak enforcement mechanisms, institutional fragmentation, lack of monitoring, poor accountability, socio-cultural barriers, violence against women, low female labour participation, and limited access to decision-making. By evaluating these legal, institutional, and structural obstacles, the study seeks to assess whether Pakistan's approach reflects meaningful implementation or remains limited to symbolic compliance and symbolic reforms. It also aims to propose legal and policy reforms that can strengthen enforcement, improve institutional responsibility, and make gender equality a central part of Pakistan's development framework. The study aims to highlight the gap between symbolic compliance and substantive gender

² United Nations Pakistan, 'Our Work on Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan' United Nations Pakistan (Islamabad: n.d.) <https://pakistan.un.org/en/sdgs> accessed 10 May 2026.

³ Saima Shabbir, 'Pakistan Ranks Last Among 148 Nations in WEF Global Gender Gap Index' Arab News (Islamabad:12 Jun 2025) <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2604282/pakistan> accessed 10 May 2026.

⁴ Article 25 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan

⁵ Article 34 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan

⁶ United Nations, 'Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls' Department of Economics and Social Affairs Sustainable Development (New York: n.d.) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5> accessed 10 May 2026

⁷ Gul, P., Wajahat, J., Ali, B., Zeb, B., & Kainat. (2025). Climate Change and Gender Justice: Legal Protections for Women in Pakistan. Retrieved From <https://Migrationletters.Com/Index.Php/MI/Article/View/12101>

equality. Pakistan may adopt laws, policies, and institutional frameworks on paper, but if weak governance, fragmented institutions, poor enforcement, limited data, social resistance, and weak accountability continue to affect implementation, then such reforms remain largely symbolic.

This research is doctrinal in nature and adopts a qualitative research methodology, supplemented by semi structured interviews, to examine the legal frameworks, institutional and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the opulent application of SDG5 in Pakistan. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks not only to analyze legal and policy materials, but also to understand how such frameworks operate in practice through institutional experiences and stakeholder perspectives. Primary data is collected through primary and secondary modes. For the primary data semi structured interviews to be conducted. Purposive sampling was adopted in this research as the study seeks in depth insights from participants who possess direct knowledge, experience, or institutional involvement relevant to the enforcement of women's right . The respondents were chosen because of their expertise, professional role, or lived experience in areas closely connected with the research objectives, including the representatives from the human rights commission of Pakistan, representatives of department of Law and parliamentary affairs ,representatives of treaty implementation cell Pakistan, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on gender issues, human activists lawyers and judges ,academics, researchers , women from diverse socio economic backgrounds ,women workers of university of Punjab and university of management and technology Lahore.

The secondary data for this research consist of a wide range of documentary and literature based sources used to support the doctrinal and analytical dimensions of the study. These sources include the national legal framework, particularly constitutional provisions, statutory laws, policies, and regulatory instruments relevant to women's rights and sustainable development, as well as judicial precedents that help explain the interpretation and application of these rights in practice. The research also relies on annual and thematic reports produced by international and national organizations, including CEDAW, UN Women, the human rights commission of Pakistan, the planning and development commission of Pakistan, and other relevant surveys and reports published by non governmental organizations and government agencies. In addition, legal databases, academic journals, and other scholarly literature are consulted to provide conceptual grounding, critical analysis, and comparative insight into the relationship between women's rights, enforcement mechanisms, and sustainable development.

Therefore this research builds upon this context to analyze SDG 5 implementation as a governance and enforcement challenge rather than merely a legislative gap.⁸ In Pakistan despite of symbolic compliance (Pakistan's formal acceptance of SDG 5 commitments through laws, policies, and international obligations) and symbolic reforms (legal and institutional changes that appear to promote gender equality)s it lacks substantial compliance which aspire to move beyond formal promises and ensuring that SDG 5 commitments are translated into actual protection, participation, empowerment, and equality for women in practice

II. THE CONCEPT AND ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5

Pakistan has gradually developed a stronger SDG 5 framework through legal, policy, and institutional measures. In 2016, Pakistan formally adopted the Sustainable Development Goals as part of its national development agenda, which gave SDG 5 domestic policy recognition. In 2018, the national SDGs Framework was approved to guide planning, coordination, and monitoring, including the creation of federal and provincial SDG mechanisms. In 2022, the national gender policy framework further strengthened the gender equality agenda by introducing a structured policy approach based on actions, indicators, and monitoring logic. From 2022 to 2025, Pakistan also expanded issue-specific legal protections in areas such as women's property rights, rape laws, workplace harassment, and women's protection. These developments show that Pakistan now has a stronger formal architecture for SDG 5, including constitutional guarantees, statutory protections, SDG institutions, and gender policy frameworks. ⁹However, the continuing challenge is that these commitments have not fully translated into practical outcomes. Weak coordination, poor implementation, lack of accountability, delayed justice, and social barriers continue to limit progress. Therefore, Pakistan's main challenge is no longer only the absence of legal commitments, but the failure to convert those

⁸ Planning Commission of Pakistan, *National Gender Policy Framework* (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives 2022) 2 <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NGPF.pdf> accessed 10 May 2026.

⁹ Ministry of Human Rights, Pakistan. 26 Jun 2025. "Renovation of Family Protection and Rehabilitation Centre for Women in Islamabad Completed, A Joint Initiative of the Ministry of Human Rights and UN Women." Press Release No. 221

commitments into measurable improvements in women's safety, equality, representation, and access to justice.¹⁰

In the context of Pakistan, SDG 5 is particularly significant because it allows gender inequality to be assessed through practical realities rather than only through the existence of laws and policies.¹¹ It asks whether women are actually safer, more represented, economically included, and able to exercise control over their daily lives. Global SDG 5 data further shows that gender inequality remains a serious challenge, as many young women are still married before adulthood, women continue to spend more time on unpaid care work than men, and their representation in parliamentary institutions remains limited. These indicators provide an important benchmark for evaluating Pakistan's progress.¹² Therefore, the analysis of SDG 5 in Pakistan should focus not merely on the number of gender-related laws, but on performance in key areas such as child marriage, girls' education, unpaid care work, financial inclusion, digital access, and women's representation in decision-making bodies.¹³

Target 5.2 focuses on ending all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private life. This is highly relevant for Pakistan because women's safety remains a major concern in homes, workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. Target 5.3 addresses harmful practices, especially child marriage, by measuring the percentage of women aged 20–24 who were married before the ages of 15 and 18.¹⁴

Similarly, Target 5.4 focuses on unpaid domestic and care work by measuring the time spent by women and men on household responsibilities and caregiving.¹⁵ In Pakistan, this is significant because women often carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid work, which limits their education, employment, financial independence, and public participation.¹⁶ Target 5.5 deals with women's participation and leadership by measuring their representation in parliament, local governments, and managerial positions.¹⁷ This target is important because gender equality cannot be achieved unless women are included in political, administrative, and economic decision-making. The global SDG 5 data also shows why measurement is necessary: according to United Nations figures, one in five young women aged 20–24 are married before the age of 18, women and girls spend about 2.5 hours more than men on unpaid domestic and care work, and women held only 27.2% of parliamentary seats in 2024.¹⁸ Therefore, Pakistan's performance under SDG 5 should not be judged only by the number of gender related laws and policies, but by actual improvement in areas such as child marriage, girls' education, unpaid care work, financial inclusion, digital access, and women's representation.¹⁹

III. LEGAL AND POLICY OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 5

A. Constitutional and International Commitments

The Constitution of Pakistan lays the foundation of Pakistan's legal obligations towards SDG5. The basic equality rule is provided under article 25, which says all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law; and there is no discrimination on the basis of sex.²⁰ Article 25²¹ also enables the State to adopt Special provisions for women and Children, thus paving the way for women protection laws and services for women, rather than being an exception to equality. Article 34²² introduces a development dimension whereby measures must be taken in order to have the full involvement of women in every aspect of national life. Thus, the Constitution not only acknowledges formal equality but also provides for positive

¹⁰ United Nations, *Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary General* (New York: United Nations 2025)
¹² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2025/secretary-general-sdg-report-2025--EN.pdf> accessed 10 May 2026.

¹¹ Gul, P., Wajahat, J., Ali, B., Zeb, B., & Kainat. (2025). Climate Change and Gender Justice: Legal Protections for Women in Pakistan. Retrieved From <https://migrationletters.com/index.php/ml/article/view/12101>

¹² Ministry of Human Rights, Pakistan. 26 Jun 2025. "Renovation of Family Protection and Rehabilitation Centre for Women in Islamabad Completed, A Joint Initiative of the Ministry of Human Rights and UN Women." Press Release No. 221.

¹³ UNICEF Pakistan, 'Education: Giving Every Child the Right to Education' UNICEF Pakistan (Islamabad: n.d.) <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education> accessed 11 May 2026.

¹⁴ National Commission on the Status of Women. 2024. *Annual Progress Report*

¹⁵ Sultan, S. 2024. "Mobilizing the Margin: Female Voter Turnout and Civil Society Advocacy in Pakistan's 2024 Elections." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 59(3): 512–530.

¹⁶ United Nations, *Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary General* (New York: United Nations 2025)
¹² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2025/secretary-general-sdg-report-2025--EN.pdf> accessed 10 May 2026

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pakistan. 2023. *Provincial SDG Support Units in Pakistan: Strengthening Inclusive Development Planning*. Islamabad: UNDP Pakistan.

¹⁸ Zia, A. Dan Bari, F. 2019. *Legislative Developments and Women's Rights in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis*. Islamabad: Aurat Foundation.

¹⁹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2022. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022*.

²⁰ Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 (n 3) art 25.

²¹ *ibid* art 25.

²² *ibid* art 34.

action of the State in the matter of women's participation. The international obligations add to this constitutional underpinning. Pakistan is a State signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). CEDAW is relevant to SDG5 since OHCHR clarifies that the Convention is employed to reverse discrimination that impacts women in their day-to-day activities such as violence, poverty, absence of legal security as well as access to credit.²³ This implies that SDG5 commitments made by Pakistan are domestic commitments as well as being subjected to international examination and responsibility.

B. Legal Frameworks aligned with SDG5

Several laws have been passed in Pakistan that help to directly achieve SDG5 goals on violence, harassment and protection. Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010,²⁴ Constitution acknowledges dignity of citizens; Legal protection against harassment was deemed necessary at workplace. Pakistan's law is relevant to SDG5 as harassment in the workplace can hinder women from participating in paid work, staying in the workforce or advancing in their career. Thus, harassment is not an issue just about the workplace, it is related to the economic participation of women. Another significant SDG5 law is the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act²⁵, as it deals with sexual violence, and the process of investigation and trial. The official Act has laid down the definition of an anti-rape crisis cell in its section 4. The Act also mandates that upon receipt of information on an anti-rape incident by the anti-rape crisis cell, steps like medico-legal examination, should be taken immediately. This is significant since when no initial response is strong, slow or insensitive, the cases of sexual violence tend to fail. The Act thus sets up a framework for law, which is supposed to get the survivors from a reporting stage to evidence collection, investigation and trial. The SDG 5. 2, which aims at eradicating violence against women and girls both in the domestic and in the public life is also supported by domestic violence laws. The Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act, 2016²⁶ was signed to provide an efficient protection and relief system towards women. The Punjab law is trying to safeguard women against domestic violence, sexual violence, psychological and economic violence, stalking and cybercrimes, says the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women. This is a broad definition, which is important as violence isn't necessarily related to physical violence. It might also involve economic domination, emotional and online abuse.

C. National SDG and Gender Policy Frameworks

Pakistan has also officially put the SDGs in its national development agenda. According to United Nations in Pakistan, Pakistan has embraced the SDGs as its country's development agenda by unanimous National Assembly Resolution in 2016.²⁷ UNDP also adds that following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Pakistan has started to localize the SDGs by creating SDG Support Units in both the federal and provincial levels planning institutions. This is crucial for SDG5 as gender equality can only be achieved by one ministry working alone. This involves multi-level planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring at both federal and provincial levels. SDG 5 is included as a more specific policy in the National SDGs Framework. The Framework considers the empowerment of women and girls as a national priority target (Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and women's participation (Target 5.5) and sound policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality and women's empowerment (Target 5.c). Target 5.c is particularly significant as it is a move towards not only making broad commitments but also ensuring that there are systems in place to monitor and publicly allocate gender equality and women empowerment.²⁸ In other words, SDG5 needs not just money, but money, money, and money and some institutions and monitoring. This is in line with the National Gender Policy Framework 2022. According to Planning Commission, it worked on a robust manifesto for the protection of equal rights of the women and the National Gender Policy Framework was implemented in 2022.²⁹ The Framework is pertinent to SDG5 since it addresses gender

²³ United Nations Human Rights Office of Right Commissioner, 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women' OHCHR (Geneva: n.d.) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw> accessed 12 May 2026.

²⁴ The Protection Against Harassment of Women at The Workplace Act 2010. (2010). Retrieved From <https://Pakistancode.Gov.Pk/English/Uy2fqajw1-Apaay2fqa-Apaay2fsap0%3d-Sg-Jjjjjjjjjjjj> (Accessed December 18, 2025).

²⁵ The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021. (2021). Retrieved From https://Na.Gov.Pk/Uploads/Documents/61aa1d38e9c5d_847.Pdf (Accessed December 18, 2025).

²⁶ The Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016. (2016). Retrieved From https://Punjablaws.Punjab.Gov.Pk/Uploads/Articles/Punjab_Protection_Of_Women_Against_Violence_Act_2016.Pdf (Accessed December 18, 2025).

²⁷ United Nations Pakistan (n 2).

²⁸ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2022. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022*.

²⁹ Planning Commission of Pakistan (n 5).

equality as a planning concern, which has to be incorporated in designing the policy, and not a social-welfare question.

D. Provincial Variation in Legal and Policy Protection

Implementing SDG5 in Pakistan is complex, given the variations in the level of protection afforded by laws and systems in the provinces. Sindh also has a Provincial Act on domestic violence called the “Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2013” which was passed by the Provincial Assembly on 8 March 2013 and assented by the Governor on 12 March 2013.³⁰ The Sindh law says that it provides for protection in case of domestic violence. This provides Sindh with a legislative framework, but the fact that domestic violence protection is highly dependent on provincial legislation and capacity for implementation also demonstrates this. A different legal system is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The KP Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act 2021, defines that it has been passed for the prevention of domestic violence against women and to protect women from sexual abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse and stalking.³¹ This only confirms that there is provincial progress, but protection's timing and structure varies from province to province. The Province of Balochistan also has its own act on “Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2014”. The official Balochistan Code, defines the Act as applying to the entire Province of Balochistan,³² with the exception of Tribal Areas and the definition of “aggrieved person”,³³ is quite broad and includes any woman, child, man or vulnerable person in a domestic relationship, who attributes domestic violence to his/her domestic partner. The Act also provides for remedies³⁴ like, protection order, residence order, monetary relief, custody order and interim order. This is an indication that the legal design does not necessarily resemble the one in other provinces. This variation is relevant for SDG 5 since women's access to protection may depend on the location where they reside, the level of work done by provincial institutions, and the law is backed up by functioning protection officers, courts, and shelters and referral systems.³⁵

E. Institutional Frameworks

The performance of federal and provincial institutions in co-operating to deliver SDG5 in Pakistan is reliant. According to United Nations in Pakistan, SDG support units have been set up at the federal and provincial level with planning institutions like the ministry of planning, development and special initiatives and provincial planning and development departments which will guide SDG implementation and monitor progress.³⁶ This indicates that SDG5 is not envisioned to be addressed as a women issue. It must become an integral part of planning, budgeting and provincial service delivery.³⁷

But, the overall SDG system presents a serious delivery challenge. In a discussion of SDGs 2025, UNDP observes that Pakistan has just 35 out of 169 SDGs targets on track with 16-18.5 percent of GDP required to meet the SDGs each year.³⁸ This is important to SDG5 since gender equality needs a long-term investment in protection services, shelters, data systems, health assistance, labour check and women participation. Weakness of SDG 5 delivery is a result of weak financing of the national SDG system.

Women focused institutions are also significant as they keep track of the responses of the state towards needs of women. The Ministry of Human Rights explains the National Commission on the Status of Women has the mandate to analyse government policies and programmes for women's development and gender equality, review laws affecting women, monitor the mechanism of redress etc., engage in research and

³⁰ The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013. (2013). https://Sja.Gos.Pk/Assets/Acts/Ordinances_Rules/Domestic%20violence%20%28prevention%20and%20protection%29%20act%2c%202013%20%26%20rules%2c%202016%20%28amendments%20upto%20date%29.Pdf (Accessed December 19, 2025).

³¹ The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021. (2021). Retrieved From https://Kpcode.Kp.Gov.Pk/Uploads/The_Khyber_Pakhtunkhwa_Domestic_Violence_Against_Women_Prevention_And_Protection_Act_2021.Pdf (Accessed December 19, 2025).

³² The Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2014. (2014). Retrieved From <https://BalochistanCode.Gob.Pk/Lawdir/A009844f-D396-433d-A3b7-716e69f6e53a.Pdf>

³³ *ibid* s 2(a).

³⁴ *ibid* s 8-11.

³⁵ Government of Pakistan. (2019). Pakistan's Implementation of The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Review. Retrieved From https://Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org/Content/Documents/233812019_06_15_Vnr_2019_Pakistan_Latest_Version.Pdf

³⁶ United Nations Pakistan (n 2).

³⁷ Sultan, S. 2024. “Mobilizing the Margin: Female Voter Turnout and Civil Society Advocacy in Pakistan's 2024 Elections.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 59(3): 512–530.

³⁸ United Nations Development Programme, *The Last Mile: Pakistan's Path to the SDGs* (Islamabad: United Nations Development Programme Pakistan 2025) 71 https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-09/dap_volume_12_issue_3-sdgs_special_edition_09-09-25.pdf accessed 12 May 2026.

dialogue with civil society and experts.³⁹ This provides NCSW a wide scope in the gender governance system in Pakistan. But such a function also exhibits a drawback. The NCSW Act, 2012 empowers the Commission to scrutinize federal laws, rules and regulations impacting women along with proposing repeal, amendment or new legislation to root out discrimination and advance equality before the law. These functions are significant however, they are primarily review, monitoring and recommendation functions. NCSW does not have any enforcement powers, nor is it a police force, a prosecution agency or a shelter or a labour inspection agency. As such, its impact in reaching SDG5 relies on the action of other institutions to follow up on the findings and recommendations.

Table 1: Pakistan's SDG 5 legal and policy architecture and its enforcement gap.⁴⁰

Year	Legal / Policy Development	Contribution to SDG 5 Framework	Analytical Significance / Remaining Gap
2016	SDGs adopted nationally by Parliament as Pakistan's own development agenda.	Gave SDG 5 formal national recognition and placed gender equality within Pakistan's development commitments.	This created constitutional and political grounding, but adoption alone did not ensure implementation at provincial and institutional levels.
2018	National SDGs Framework approved for federal and provincial coordination.	Provided a structured mechanism for planning, monitoring and aligning provincial development priorities with SDG targets.	It improved coordination in principle, but weak data systems and uneven provincial capacity limited measurable progress.
2022	National Gender Policy Framework introduced with action, KPIs and monitoring logic.	Shifted gender equality from broad policy language toward measurable planning and performance indicators.	Its effectiveness depends on institutional accountability, regular reporting and integration into mainstream development planning.
2020–2025	Issue-specific legal expansion, including women's property rights, anti-rape laws and workplace harassment protections.	Strengthened statutory protection for women and addressed key barriers to safety, dignity, economic participation and equality.	These laws show legal progress, but enforcement gaps, social resistance, weak reporting and limited access to justice continue to restrict outcomes.
	Pakistan has developed a stronger SDG 5 architecture through law, policy and institutions.	SDG 5 now has statutory tools, national policy direction and federal-provincial implementation structures.	Real progress requires moving gender equality from a welfare concern to a core planning principle in development policy, budgeting, data collection and institutional accountability.

IV. ENFORCEMENT DEFICITS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN THE REALISATION OF SDG 5 IN PAKISTAN

The realization of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in Pakistan cannot be understood only by examining the existence of constitutional guarantees, statutory protections, policy frameworks, or institutional commitments.⁴¹ The central issue is not merely whether Pakistan has adopted laws and policies for gender equality, but whether these commitments are capable of producing effective protection, remedy,

³⁹ Ministry of Human Rights, 'National Commission on the Status of Women' Ministry of Human Rights (Islamabad: n.d.) <https://www.mohr.gov.pk/Detail/MjRjMDg2MmMtYTUxNS00N2QwLTgwMWMtZTk3MGZjZjdhYTg5> accessed 12 May 2026.

⁴⁰ Compiled from Pakistan's SDG framework, Planning Commission SDGs National Framework, and National Gender Policy Framework.

⁴¹ Sultan, S. 2024. "Mobilizing the Margin: Female Voter Turnout and Civil Society Advocacy in Pakistan's 2024 Elections." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 59(3): 512–530.

participation, and empowerment for women in practice.⁴² In this regard, the enforcement deficit represents one of the most serious obstacles to the achievement of SDG 5.⁴³ It reflects the gap between formal legal recognition and actual implementation.⁴⁴ Although Pakistan has laws relating to violence against women, workplace harassment, inheritance rights, child marriage, political participation, and women's protection, these laws often fail to deliver meaningful outcomes because the complaint-to-remedy chain remains weak and fragmented.⁴⁵ Women may have a legal right to complain, but the practical journey from reporting a violation to receiving protection, investigation, prosecution, conviction, compensation, or institutional relief is often long, uncertain, and discouraging.⁴⁶ This broken chain reduces the practical value of legal rights and allows gender-based violations to continue despite formal legal safeguards. Therefore, the enforcement deficit is not a single failure it is a combination of weak reporting mechanisms, low conviction rates, poor institutional response, lack of monitoring, absence of survivor centred procedures, and limited accountability of those responsible for implementation.⁴⁷

The structural barriers to SDG 5 are also deeply connected with social, economic, cultural, and administrative realities.⁴⁸ Patriarchal pressures often discourage women from reporting violence, harassment, denial of inheritance, forced marriage, or discrimination because such reporting may expose them to family pressure, social stigma, retaliation, or further insecurity. Economic dependency further limits women's ability to seek justice, leave abusive environments, pursue education, enter the labour market, or claim property and financial rights.⁴⁹ In this way, gender inequality is not limited to violence alone; it also appears through discrimination, harmful practices, unpaid care burdens, limited economic participation, weak financial inclusion, and restricted access to digital and institutional resources.⁵⁰ These barriers directly affect Pakistan's development because women's exclusion from education, employment, decision making, and economic planning reduces national productivity and weakens inclusive growth.⁵¹ At the same time, institutional failures, such as non-compliance with workplace harassment procedures, weak enforcement of protection laws, poor coordination between federal and provincial bodies, and lack of outcome-based accountability, prevent SDG 5 from becoming a real development priority.⁵² Another major difficulty is the shortage of reliable gender disaggregated data and weak SDG 5 measurement systems. Without proper data on violence, unpaid care work, inheritance denial, workplace harassment, women's representation, financial access, and legal outcomes, the state cannot accurately identify gaps or measure progress.⁵³ As a result, gender equality may be reported through laws, policies, and institutional structures, but not through actual improvements in women's lived realities. The empirical data explicit that is implementation of SDG 5 is not as a symbolic commitment, but as an enforcement challenge.⁵⁴ It suggests that Pakistan's progress depends on whether legal and governance frameworks can move beyond formal compliance and create measurable outcomes in safety, justice, economic inclusion, representation, and social equality for women.⁵⁵

According to UNFPA Pakistan 28% of women between 15 and 49 age group have been physically abused, 6% sexual and 34% of ever married women experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse by their husbands while 56% of women who were physically or sexually victim of violence did not seek help, or report to anyone about the violence.⁵⁶ Domestic violence is frequently viewed as a disciplining measure in marriage

⁴² Hossain, N. 2022. "The Paradox of Empowerment: Women, Development, and Change in Bangladesh." *Development and Change* 53(2): 345–36.

⁴³ Awan, S. M., Waris, M. dan Hussain, M. 2020. "Violence against Women in Politics: A Study of Backlash Effect of Gender Quota in Parliament of Pakistan." *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review* 1(4): 361–367.

⁴⁴ Sultan, S. 2024. "Mobilizing the Margin: Female Voter Turnout and Civil Society Advocacy in Pakistan's 2024 Elections." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 59(3): 512–530.

⁴⁵ Interview with batool F, Women rights expert and advocate high court, Centre for law and justice, Lahore, Pakistan. 20th January 2026.

⁴⁶ Government of Pakistan. (2019). Pakistan's Implementation of The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Review. Retrieved From

https://Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org/Content/Documents/233812019_06_15_Vnr_2019_Pakistan_Latest_Version.Pdf accessed

⁴⁷ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2022. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022*.

⁴⁸ Interview with Nasir, Saeed. 20 January 2026. Executive Coordinator, Punjab Treaty Implementation Cell, Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Department, National Tower, Egerton Road, Lahore.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). 2023. *State of Human Rights in Pakistan 2023*. Lahore: HRCP.

⁵⁰ National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW). 2023. *National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan: A Summary*. Islamabad: NCSW.

⁵¹ Interview with Nasir, Saeed. 20 January 2026. Executive Coordinator, Punjab Treaty Implementation Cell, Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Department, National Tower, Egerton Road, Lahore.

⁵² Khan, A., Jawed, A. & Qidwai, K. (2021). Women and Protest Politics in Pakistan. *Gender & Development*, 29(2-3), Pp.391–410. Retrieved From <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2021.1981623>

⁵³ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). 2023. *State of Human Rights in Pakistan 2023*. Lahore: HRCP.

⁵⁴ Interview with Fareeha Rizvi Deputy Director Litigation Law and Parliamentary affairs Punjab, Interview taken on 23 April 2026

⁵⁵ Interview with Batool F, Women rights Expert and Advocate High Court, Centre for Law and Justice, Lahore, Pakistan. 20th January, 2026.

⁵⁶ UNFPA Pakistan, *Gender-Based Violence*, citing Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017–18, National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and ICF, accessed May 2, 2026.

and survivors are put under pressure by the families/community elders to accept the abuse or reconcile with the abuser.⁵⁷ This is crucial as SDG5 is not achieved when laws are put into place, but when women can do so without fear. Thus, the complaint-remedy chain in Pakistan is weak as many women do not reach the first step of the remedy chain due to social silence and lack of trust in institutions and fear of the reactions.⁵⁸

The second non-compliance seems to have occurred in police and investigation. According to United Nations in Pakistan less than 2% of all police officers in Pakistan are female, which decreases the willingness of women to report a crime and access to justice in Pakistan.⁵⁹ This directly correlates to SDG 5.2 as the initial contact a survivor makes, may make a difference on whether the case goes forward or disappears. In most police stations in Pakistan, there is no gender oriented desk and in some of the police stations, women's desks are not well developed and institutionalised, limiting women's access to protection.⁶⁰ It's not an administrative issue. When a woman cannot report safely or the report is made by someone who is not sensitised to gender issues, the case could start to be weak. There is also a low level of deterrence. According to data submitted in the Senate in 2025, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) witnessed seven convictions in 176 incidents of rape, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) had one conviction in 258 cases of rape, and Sindh had none in 243 cases of rape while Balochistan also had zero conviction in 21 cases of rape in 2024.⁶¹ As these numbers indicate, reporting is not in itself punishment. With SDG5 this implies that the system is not effective in terms of protection, but also in terms of deterrence. If the offenders do not think that there is a chance of conviction, it is easier to repeat violence against women. This is important because SDG5 cannot be translated into action if women are not aware on how to use protection mechanisms or they are afraid of potential loss of reputation, jobs or families due to their complaints. So it's not enough to only have the legal forum to enforce workplace harassment, it's important to be aware of it as well.⁶²

While women who are victims of violence, particularly domestic violence, are entitled to protection, compassion and justice, there are social pressures and entrenched cultural norms, which are influencing women to reconcile with the offenders.⁶³ This is at the heart of SDG5 as it can make violence a public wrong private in family. Implementation is also hampered by deep rooted patriarchal norms that normalize domestic violence as a disciplinary tool within marriage.⁶⁴ Pushing a survivor back into the very context in which he or she was victimized renders the law ineffective in providing protection.⁶⁵

If there is no awareness of abuse as violence, reporting and enforcement is very difficult. This is reflected in the interview as well where domestic violence is seen as a private issue and sometimes a response to 'misbehaviour' of the wife.⁶⁶ The developing impact goes beyond the scope of the criminal case. Violence protection enhances women's freedom of movement, their participation in public life, the security of their physical and mental health, their right to continue their education, paid work and institutional protection.⁶⁷

Pakistan's SDG5 gap is prominently observed in child marriage which is directly under SDG 5.3. According to the child marriage profile, Pakistan has an estimated 18.9 million child brides and 1 in 6 young girls are child brides. Similarly, it is evident that there is a high level of inequality by background in this profile: among all women aged 20-24, child marriage before age 18 was 51 per cent in the poorest wealth quintile and 4% in the richest wealth quintile.⁶⁸

There is not an equal distribution of the problem. Poor girls are far more likely to be married early, compromising their education, health, ability to move around and eventual economic independence.⁶⁹

⁵⁷ Interview with Fareeha Rizvi (Deputy Director Litigation, Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Punjab), 23 April 2026.

⁵⁸ Interview with Salman Farooq, Human Right Commission of Pakistan, Interview taken on 4th April 2026.

⁵⁹ United Nations Pakistan, 'Breaking Down Barriers for Female Police Officers' United Nations Pakistan (6 March 2023) <https://pakistan.un.org/en/221888-breaking-down-barriers-female-police-officers> accessed 12 May 2026.

⁶⁰ Interview with Asif Akeel (Programme Coordinator, Law and Justice, Punjab), 13 February 2026.

⁶¹ Senate of Pakistan, 'Event Title: Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri, Chairperson Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights Presiding Over a Meeting of the Committee at Parliament House Islamabad' (Islamabad: 27 November 2025) https://www.senate.gov.pk/en/news_content.php?id=NjY3NA== accessed 12 May 2026.

⁶² Interview with Hafiz Naimatullah (Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan), interview taken on 13 February 2026

⁶³ Interview with Fiaz M. (Civil Judge cum Judicial Magistrate, Civil Courts Lahore, Pakistan), 13 February 2026.

⁶⁴ Interview with Fareeha Rizvi deputy Director litigation law and parliamentary affairs, Punjab, Interview taken on 23 April 2026

⁶⁵ Interview with Saira Naheed (Lecturer, School of Law and Policy, University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan), 5 February 2026

⁶⁶ Interview with Batool F. (Women Rights Expert and Advocate High Court, Centre for Law and Justice, Lahore, Pakistan), 20 January 2026.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ UNICEF, *Child Marriage Country Profile: Pakistan* (New York: UNICEF 2021) 1 <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁶⁹ *ibid*

There is also a clear gap in performance seen in girls' education. UNICEF Pakistan reports about 25.1 million children in the age group 5-16 out of school, that is 35% of the total population in this age group.⁷⁰ This gender gap is reflected in the UNICEF's Pakistan Country Office Annual Report 2023 where the out-of-school rate of girls (5-16) was reported as 52.6 per cent (13.8 million girls) while that of boys was 47.3% (12.4 million boys).⁷¹ Education isn't the only problem. It is directly connected with SDG5 as girls out of school risk being subjected to child marriage, economic dependence and less involvement in public life.

Honour based violence also demonstrates the dichotomy between the formal and social equality. According to a national reporting on the issue based on the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reports, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 124 women and 77 men were killed in the name of honour in 2024.⁷² This is a provincial figure, but is an indicator of how violence can be used to restrict women's choices. If women are liable to punishment for marriage, if women's mobility/supposed "honour" is an issue, then SDG 5 is not considered as achieved if equality is in the law.

This is also reflected in Pakistan's economic performance for SDG5 in terms of financial inclusion. 13% of Pakistani women as opposed to 34% of men had financial accounts.⁷³ This is a wide disparity as an account is not just a banking facility. It impacts on the ability of women to earn income safely, to save money, access credit and become digitally financially independent. The same research also reveals that while education, income and employment have the same impact on financial inclusion for both men and women, the impact is weaker for women due to larger social barriers.⁷⁴ Target 5.4 is another barrier as a result of unpaid care work. In Pakistan women allocate about three hours a day in non-market activities which are not included in the calculation of economic activity and these activities include cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for children and elderly etc.⁷⁵ This is significant because unpaid work takes up time that could be spent on education, paid work, skills development, legal processes in seeking justice and/or public engagement. Data from the World Bank is also included for Pakistan as an SDG indicator, as a share of a 24 hour day and connected to the SDG indicator from the UN Statistics Division's SDG database.⁷⁶ Hence, the SDG5 gap in Pakistan is not just on women out of the labor force, but also to the work done by women but not paid and undervalued.

The difference between SDG5 and the general equality promise is that it needs to be measurable via indicators. This means that in the context of Pakistan the gender-disaggregated data becomes fundamental in the process of implementation. Data availability is a key concern in measuring progress towards SDGs: At least one-fourth of the 230 SDG indicators in Pakistan lack reliable information and 45% of indicators have data but it is not being analysed or calculated.⁷⁷ UN Women Data Hub paints a more detailed picture of Pakistan's gender-data gap. According to it, in 2020 merely 49.1% of the indicators were available in Pakistan for monitoring SDGs from a gender perspective.⁷⁸ It also pinpoints some of the areas that share the need for strengthening, such as the gender pay gap, physical and sexual harassment, gender and asset access (land), gender and poverty, and gender and the environment. They have an impact on the state's capacity to identify where women are being left behind, who needs support and if the public actions are making a positive difference to SDG5 outcomes.

The second vulnerability is that gender data is fragmented between a number of institutions. Data on violence can be stored in police records, workplace data can be stored in workplaces, case outcomes can be stored in court records, medico-legal and reproductive health information can be stored in health department records and shelter or service information can be stored in social welfare department records.

⁷⁰ UNICEF Pakistan, 'Education: Giving Every Child the Right to Education' UNICEF Pakistan (Islamabad: n.d.) <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷¹ UNICEF, *Country Office Annual Report 2023: Pakistan* (Islamabad: UNICEF 2023) 1 <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/5841/file/Pakistan-2023-COAR.pdf> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷² Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *State of Human Rights in 2024* (Lahore: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 2025) 117 <https://hrqp-web.org/hrqpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2025-State-of-Human-Rights-in-2024-REV.pdf> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷³ Amar Razzaq, Shengze Qin, Yewang Zhou, Irfan Mahmood and Mohamad Alnafissa, 'Determinants of Financial Inclusion Gaps in Pakistan and Implications for Achieving SDGs' (2024) 14 *Scientific Reports* 13667 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-63445-6> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷⁴ International Labour Organization. (2025). Pakistan Launches Gender Pay Gap Report and National Action Plan for Equal Pay. [Online] Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/Resource/News/Pakistan-Launches-Gender-Pay-Gap-Report-And-National-Action-Plan-Equal-Pay>.

⁷⁵ Pakistan's Institute of Development Economics, 'Counting Women's Unpaid Care Work in Pakistan' PIDE (Islamabad: n.d.) <https://pide.org.pk/research/counting-womens-unpaid-care-work-in-pakistan/> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷⁶ World Bank, 'Proportion of Time Spent on Unpaid Domestic and Care Work, Female (% of 24 Hour Day)' World Bank Data (Washington: n.d.) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.TIM.UWRK.FE> accessed 11 May 2026.

⁷⁷ Interview with Asif Akeel program coordinator law and justice program Lahore, Pakistan. Interview taken on 14th march 2026

⁷⁸ UN Women, 'Pakistan' UN Women Data Hub (New York: n.d.) <https://data.unwomen.org/country/pakistan> accessed 12 May 2026.

⁷⁹Without a common format, SDG5 monitoring is fragmented if these institutions do not report in a common format.

Monitoring SDG5 in Pakistan needs to be outcome based rather than on the laws, schemes or institutions. This separation is important when viewed in the context of available data from Pakistan's country for UN Women. According to it, 77.8% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality with a focus on violence against women are in place. Yet, the same source notes that only 49.1% of indicators related to gender were available to measure, in the SDG.⁸⁰ This contrast highlights that Pakistan has some laws in place but is yet to have sufficient data to assess effectiveness of these laws.

In addition, Pakistan's governance framework for SDG 5 is fragmented because different federal and provincial bodies, SDG taskforces, planning institutions, women development departments, and human rights commissions often work without effective coordination.⁸¹ Social and cultural barriers also play a major role, as patriarchal norms, cultural resistance, poverty, lack of awareness, weak legal literacy, and political instability prevent women from claiming their rights.⁸² As a result, gender equality is often treated as a welfare concern rather than a central development issue.

V. REFORMS TO REDUCE THE GAP BETWEEN SYMBOLIC IMPLEMENTATION TO SUBSTANTIAL COMPLIANCE

The reform framework for SDG 5 in Pakistan must initiate by addressing the gap between legal commitment and actual enforcement. The persistence of gender inequality despite constitutional guarantees, protective laws, and institutional mechanisms shows that the issue is not only legislative insufficiency but weak implementation, poor accountability, and fragmented governance.⁸³ Therefore, reform must focus on creating enforceable institutional responsibility, improving coordination between federal and provincial bodies, strengthening gender-disaggregated data systems, and linking SDG 5 targets with measurable policy outcomes.⁸⁴ Most importantly, gender equality must be shifted from a limited welfare concern to a central principle of development planning. It should be integrated into budgeting, law enforcement, education, health, labor policy, digital access, and economic governance. Unless SDG 5 is treated as a core development priority rather than a symbolic or sectoral commitment, Pakistan's progress will remain procedural, and the substantive objective of gender equality will remain unrealized.⁸⁵

The first priority of reforms is to enhance gender disaggregated data collection in all SDG5 areas. However, Pakistan shouldn't only measure the broad level national averages.⁸⁶ The disaggregation should be by sex, province, district, age, income group, disability, rural/Urban. This is needed because women's situation may be worse than is reflected in the national averages, particularly for poor women, rural women, women with disabilities and girls. Secondly, the reform priority is to make a linkage between the reporting systems of different institutions. Without coordination, no gathering of gender data should be allowed by Police, courts, health departments, labour departments, education departments, social welfare departments and SDG units.⁸⁷ Monitoring should be connected with action, not just with statistics, but with action, within the institutions. The third reform priority is to publicise and make monitoring of SDG5 outcome based. ⁸⁸Building on this Pakistan should move forward and publish SDG5 score cards on a regular basis to reflect advancement in the areas of violence, unpaid care, participation in the workplace, leadership, access to digital resources and service delivery and budget allocation. If these are not publicly reported, SDG5 can become just a formal reporting process, and not a quantifiable process towards women's safety, equality and empowerment.

The coordination is needed for SDG5 delivery as the problems faced by women may be present in multiple departments. Such a survivor of violence might require medical attention, refuge, legal assistance, police

⁷⁹ Interview with Saira Naheed, Lecturer School of Law and Policy, University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan.05 February 2026

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Interview with Dr. Amanullah, Professor, Dean University Law College, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, Interview taken on 20th April 2026.

⁸² Interview with Barrister Saeed Nasir, Executive Coordinator, Punjab Treaty Implementation cell, Human Rights and Minorities affairs Department. National Tower, Egerton Road Lahore. 20 January 2026.

⁸³ Interview with Hamid ul Rehman Nasir (2026). Civil Judge Cum Judicial Magistrate, Model Town Courts Lahore, Pakistan .24 February 2026.

⁸⁴ Interview with Batool F, Women rights Expert and Advocate High Court, Centre for Law and Justice, Lahore, Pakistan 20th January, 2026.

⁸⁵ Interview with Qaiser, k, b (2026) Director School of Law and Policy, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Interview taken on 10february 2026.

⁸⁶ Interview with Fareeha Rizvi Deputy Director Litigatiob Law and Parliamentary affairs, Punjab, Interview taken on 23 April 2026.

⁸⁷ Interview with Farah Zia Director Human Right Commission pf Pakistan Lahore. Interview taken on April 13th 2026.

⁸⁸ Interview with Salman Farooq, Human Right Commission of Pakistan, Interview taken on 4th April 2026.

assistance, counselling and court orders. According to a study conducted by UNFPA Pakistan on the barriers to accessing the services provided by the public-sector on GBV, the organization came up with a list of significant barriers to access to the major GBV services by women survivors and came up with recommendations which would have led to a more effective response. There is a need to enhance and streamline coordination between institutions.⁸⁹ It is not an issue of law but it is an issue of governance. They are made more specific by the Punjab public-sector GBV service delivery report. It suggests identifying the posts, which should be sanctioned, and standard operating procedures (SOP) for seamless coordination between the Social Welfare Department, Women Protection Authority, police, Department of Health, the prosecution and judiciary.⁹⁰ This demonstrates how this fails to happen with agencies present, but no clear linkage between their roles, staffing and referral process. For SDG5, it's not just about the availability of services, it's about a woman's ability to navigate through them without being stymied, confused, or repeatedly put at risk.

A key part of the study is its analysis of enforcement deficits and the disconnect between policy and practice in SDG 5 implementation. This aligns with SDG 5's broader goal of achieving full and effective implementation of gender equality initiatives. The research suggests that weak monitoring, lack of political will, socio-cultural resistance, and fragmented enforcement contribute to this disconnect, which is an essential issue to address to ensure the realization of SDG 5.

The major governance problem is that between the mandate and capacity of institutions. There are also capacity gaps in policing. There are only 15509 female officers in a total police force of 489645 in Pakistan, which makes up 3.2% of the total police force.⁹¹ This is because this is a statistic pertinent to institutional delivery as police are likely to be the first public institution that women will reach out to for protection. Weak law is thus not the sole issue concerning the governance problem. Yes, SDG units and commissions, protection bodies and service models exist in Pakistan, but they require to be clear about their mandate, trained staff, budgets, referral systems and accountability.⁹² In the absence of these, SDG5 is still spread out across a number of offices and the protection is weak, inconsistent and women continue to experience delays and lack of support. An enforcement is not just about punishment: this is the best SDG5 point. It's about providing the environment for women to learn, work, move, participate and live in without fear. While this is a challenge for the formal system, it will not be able to make a major impact in the delivery of SDG5 in Pakistan unless it gets over the issue of non-reporting, policing, conviction rates, non-compliance at the workplace, reconciliation pressures, and economic dependency.

The National Gender Data Portal is a good idea that will help alleviate this fragmentation. The National Gender Data Portal is a dynamic and interactive portal which brings together statistics and knowledge on indicators related to women, enables evidence based gender analysis and assists the Government of Pakistan in fulfilling international commitments on gender.⁹³ This is significant for SDG5, as reporting is not just about collecting data and information, it is about communicating through these and transforming them into policy, budget and institutional accountability.

Outcome-based accountability also has to be accompanied by public monitoring of resources. SDG indicator 5.c.1 is about the existence of gender equality and women's empowerment allocation accounting systems and their publication.⁹⁴ This is included as part of political participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions. This has a direct application to Pakistan as SDG5 will not be realised without visible budgets. Without tracking, it is hard to understand if gender equality is a real priority of the government or not, or only a statement of policy. This is the kind of accountability, which is referred to in Pakistan's National SDGs framework.⁹⁵ It says that a good system of monitoring would be in place to prepare an annual report to be submitted to the national economic council. This is critical as SDG5 should be discussed at a high policy level on a regular basis. Ongoing monitoring can help monitor if provinces are making efforts to

⁸⁹ Farida Shaheed, Namra Gilani, Bushra Shehzad, Sohail Warraich and Hiba Akbar, *Barriers to Access & Uptake of Public Sector GBV Services by Women Survivors of Violence* (Islamabad: UNFPA Pakistan 2024) ii <https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2024-10/Barriers-TO-Access-Uptake-Of-Public-Sector-GBV-Services-By-Women-Survivors-Of-Violence.pdf> accessed 12 May 2026.

⁹⁰ Interview with Dr. Amanullah, Professor, Dean University Law College, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, Interview taken on 20th April 2026

⁹¹ Amna Munawar Khan, 'Gender Disparity in Pakistan's Police' *Defence Journal* (10 October 2024) <https://www.defencejournal.com/2024/10/10/gender-disparity-in-pakistans-police/> accessed 12 May 2026.

⁹² Interview with Dr. Zaheer Cheema, Assistant Professor, University of Punjab, Interview taken on 3rd May 2026.

⁹³ Interview with Salman Farooq, Human Right Commission of Pakistan, Interview taken on 4th April 2026.

⁹⁴ Interview with Dr. Amanullah, Professor, Dean University Law College, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, interview taken on 20th April 2026

⁹⁵ Government of Pakistan (n 54).

enhance protection systems, if participation of women is increasing, if the issues of unpaid care are being recognised, and if institutions are responding to violence and exclusion.⁹⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

From the perusal of the primary and secondary data it is evident that Pakistan's commitment towards SDG 5 and its opulent implementation reveals a significant gap. There seems to be symbolic reforms like there are laws, policies, institutions, or commitments that create the appearance of progress without producing meaningful change in practice. In the context of SDG 5, symbolic enforcement occurs when the state adopts gender equality legislation, establishes commissions, launches policy frameworks, or makes international commitments, but these measures remain confined to official documents, speeches, and reports. Such reforms may improve Pakistan's formal compliance with constitutional and international obligations, yet they do not necessarily transform women's lived realities if complaints are not investigated, institutions remain under resourced, data is not collected, offenders are not held accountable, and women continue to face violence, exclusion, and discrimination. Therefore, symbolic reform reflects a gap between legal recognition and practical enforcement. What is required is

substantive reform, that requires that gender equality measures be translated into measurable outcomes. This means that laws must be backed by implementation budgets, trained institutions, accessible complaint mechanisms, gender disaggregated data, provincial coordination, monitoring systems, and accountability for non compliance. However a symbolic framework becomes substantive only when it changes institutional behavior and produces visible improvement in women's safety, representation, economic participation, inheritance rights, access to justice, and protection from violence. Pakistan's SDG 5 commitments must therefore move beyond formal adoption and become part of the State's core planning, budgeting, governance, and enforcement architecture. Without this shift from symbolic compliance to substantive compliance, gender equality will remain a legal promise rather than a lived reality.

The article concludes that a governance fragmentation also has a negative impact on SDG5 delivery. One institution cannot solely address the issue of gender equality. This demands cooperation and collaboration not only between the planning bodies and women commissions, but the police, the Courts, Health departments, Labour departments, social welfare offices, Shelters, Schools, and local government institutions. Action by these bodies on their own means women must deal with a complex and challenging system. It is imperative that a correct SDG5 system makes these different units into a unified system of delivery. Monitoring also is critical. Without credible data, accountability and transparency of the populace, Pakistan can never enhance SDG5. Disaggregated data related to gender is required to monitor violence, unpaid care, workplace participation, financial access, access to digital and leadership and access to justice. In the absence of this information, it is hard to measure progress and policy is reactive and not preventative.

Finally, SDG5 implementation in Pakistan needs to be transformed into a change of symbolic change to quantifiable implementation. The emphasis should be shifted towards the announcement of laws and policies to ensuring that they apply in the lives of women. This involves enhanced implementation, better institutional collaboration, investment in protection measures, better valuation of unpaid care, greater economic and digital access for women and greater participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels. SDG5 can only gain relevance when equality is not mere promise of the state, but a reality of the women.

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⁹⁶ Interview with Dr. Jawad Riaz, Assistant Professor, University of Punjab, Interview taken on 3rd May 2026.

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