

# How To Address The Gender Gap In Pakistan?



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(<https://nayadaur.tv/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PIDE-logo-CORRECT.png>)

Pakistan presently ranks among the worst countries in gender parity, only above Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. According to the “Global Gender Gap Report 2021 ([http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf))” published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Pakistan ranked 153rd out of 156 countries on the gender parity index. The country ranked 7th among eight countries in South Asia, only better than Afghanistan. Pakistan’s gender gap has widened by 0.7 percentage points in just one year.

WEF uses four sub-indexes to arrive at the rank of 156 countries. Pakistan ranked 153rd in health and survival, 152nd in economic participation and opportunity, 144th in educational attainment, and 98th in political empowerment indices.

The said report reflects that Pakistan has failed to improve its score on gender parity in the last sixteen years (the gender parity score was 0.553 in 2006 and is 0.556 in 2021).

Nighbouring countries, including Bangladesh and India, have shown remarkable improvement to reduce the gender gap. For Bangladesh, the gender parity score has improved from 0.627 in 2006 to 0.719 in 2021 and the country is ranked 65th in the world out of 156 countries. Similarly, India and Sri Lanka have a better ranking on gender parity relative to Pakistan.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had calamitous effects on countless aspects of the world. ILO, LinkedIn, and Ipsos have noted its impact on gender parity. According to ILO, 5% of employed women lost their jobs due to the pandemic compared to 3.9% of the men. The pandemic has also promoted a digital renaissance and has inclined the world to adapt to a technologically influenced setting. These layoffs have resulted in labor market disruption. LinkedIn data shows that the number of women in leadership roles has decreased significantly. The pandemic is also threatening future economic opportunities for women. The probability of being re-employed after the pandemic ends is low for women, and a drop in incomes is expected for them.

After careful evaluation of the WEF index and encapsulating statistics that directly illustrate the gender gap in Pakistan compared to other economies in the world, it can be deduced unequivocally that Pakistan currently has one of the worst gender gaps in the world. The report shows that Pakistan needs 136 years to close the gender gap with the existing performance rate. Therefore to bridge the gender gap quickly the country should rethink its policies and standards. The following is proposed.

**Economic Empowerment:** Regularize the informal economy with a specific focus on the country's rural economy where women can easily avail economic opportunities and contribute to Pakistan's economy. Women-

specific livelihood opportunities in more value-added fields such as tourism, hoteling, and packaging should be promoted. Encourage entrepreneurship for educated and businesswomen to actively participate in e-commerce. Access of women to potential markets is a considerable challenge. Finding markets to sell products by women is very costly for women. The government should develop and dedicate special zones for women at no cost to the women entrepreneurs. The government should also provide soft loans to women to build micro-entrepreneurs and subsidize inputs to establish new businesses. It is vital to offer technical education to education to women, especially IT-related education to enable them to use virtual modes of promoting their business and selling online.

**Educational Empowerment:** Pakistan needs to provide education to every citizen of Pakistan. According to UNICEF statistics, an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out of school – around 60% of them are females. To increase the enrollment ratio at the primary and secondary level the government shall build new schools and provide training to the teachers before recruitment for addressing the drop-out issues. The provision of schools for girls at a local level is the key to reduce the educational gap.

**Health Empowerment:** A well-targeted awareness campaign operated by Lady Health Workers is required to improve the availability of access to healthcare among women. Improving maternal health is one of Pakistan's critical challenges due to supply constraints, especially in rural areas. Provision of health services at the village level is the only solution to improve maternal health. The government's health card scheme may not solve the problem of maternal health due to mobility issues.