



Submission in Response to the Call for Input under Human Rights Council Resolution 52/14 on Integrated Approaches to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan





Submission in Response to the Call for Input under Human Rights Council Resolution 52/14 on Integrated Approaches to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Mandate and Context of the Submission	2
Pakistan's Integrated Approaches: Progress, Challenges, and Best Practices.....	6
Key Challenges, Gaps, and Lessons Learned.....	23
Key SDG Progress and Challenges in Pakistan (Human Rights Lens).....	26
Recommendations for Accelerated Progress by 2030.....	28
Annex A: Alignment of HRC Resolution 52/14 Questions with Pakistan's SDG Efforts and NCHR's Role	32
Annex B: NCHR Pakistan's Thematic Reports (2022-2025) and SDG Linkages.....	35

Executive Summary

The National Commission for Human Rights is an independent statutory body mandated to protect and promote human rights in Pakistan. Guided by the Constitution and international human rights instruments, it monitors rights violations, advises on government policy, and promotes institutional accountability.

This submission outlines key practices, lessons, and challenges in integrating human rights into Pakistan's sustainable development agenda. It draws on NCHR's work across key human rights issues including but not limited to access to justice, gender equality, child rights, labour rights, the rights of minorities, digital rights, labour protections, and climate justice.

Since adopting the 2030 Agenda in 2015, Pakistan has made notable strides, including becoming the first country to pass a parliamentary resolution recognising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a national priority. As an A-status National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), NCHR plays a central role in translating these commitments into rights-based outcomes and reflects Pakistan's compliance and actualisation of SDG 16.a.1

Progress on SDGs includes mainstreaming SDGs into policy frameworks, establishing SDG units and parliamentary taskforces, and reforming planning instruments to align with SDG targets. Government initiatives range from social protection and gender empowerment programmes, inclusive education and employment policies to major climate efforts like the 'Ten Billion Tree Tsunami'.

NCHR contributes to this landscape by monitoring and conducting investigations, offering policy guidance, and engaging with international mechanisms, strengthening accountability in SDG implementation.

Nonetheless, Pakistan remains behind on many targets. Disparities in basic services persist, and many human rights concerns and violations remain unresolved. Systemic inefficiencies in the justice system and the absence of disaggregated data hinder targeted policy responses. Climate vulnerability further compounds these challenges.

To accelerate progress, the report recommends legal and policy reforms aligned with international standards, integration of human rights into fiscal planning, and investment in institutional capacity. It underscores the need for robust disaggregated data and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure development that is equitable, sustainable, and grounded in rights.

Mandate and Context of the Submission

This submission responds to the call for input issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) under Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/52/14, adopted on 3 April 2023. The call seeks insights on best practices, challenges, and lessons learned in adopting integrated approaches to human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ This report offers Pakistan's national perspective, reflecting the role and experience of its premier NHRI: the National Commission for Human Rights

The 2030 Agenda is grounded in human rights, drawing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other core treaties. Its pledge to "leave no one behind" aligns with the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Over 90 percent of the 169 SDG targets correspond to international human rights and labour standards, underscoring the interdependence of the two frameworks. Human rights offer the normative foundation for sustainable development, while the SDGs provide a practical roadmap for realising these rights across social, economic, and environmental domains.²

NCHR, established under the NCHR Act 2012, operates independently in line with the Paris Principles. Its mandate spans monitoring and investigating rights violations, raising public awareness, conducting research, producing data, and advising the Government on compliance with domestic and international human rights commitments.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda, NCHR's role goes beyond traditional reporting. As Resolution 52/14 focuses on integrated approaches, the Commission is uniquely positioned to assess and influence how Pakistan aligns its SDG strategies with human rights obligations, especially in addressing gaps that affect marginalised communities. This requires not only oversight but also active engagement in shaping policy and institutional practice.

A milestone in this regard was the NCHR's A-status accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in 2024. This recognition affirms its independence, broad mandate and operational strength.

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Call for Input: Report on Best Practices, Challenges and Lessons Learned Concerning the Human Rights-Based Approach in the Context of the 2030 Agenda*, 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-input-report-best-practices-challenges-and-lessons-learned-concerning>

² OHCHR, *SDG Implementation by the United Nations System: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. <https://sdgs.un.org/un-system-sdg-implementation/office-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-ohchr-54097>

The UN Human Rights Office highlights the importance of strong NHRIs in advancing the SDGs, empowering communities, and reframing progress beyond economic indicators. NCHR's accreditation has strengthened its legitimacy as a key actor in rights-based development, not only ensuring independent oversight and accountability but also supporting the government in ensuring that SDG progress is rights-based, inclusive, and accountable.

Advancing Integrated Approaches to Human Rights and Sustainable Development

NCHR adopts an integrated approach grounded in a rights-based framework to assess development progress. Our institutional mandate enables us to bridge gaps between policy and implementation by producing hard-hitting evidence-based reports, facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues, and issuing public recommendations. NCHR's interventions often seek to embed rights protections within existing SDG mechanisms and legislative frameworks.

Challenges include fragmented data systems, insufficient fiscal prioritisation of human rights, and the marginalisation of minority voices in policymaking. However, increased recognition of the link between sustainable development and human rights among civil society and government actors offers new opportunities for coordinated action.

Conceptual Framework: A Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Sustainable Development

HRBA³ gains concrete expression through the work of NCHR, turning its principles into institutional practice and impact:

- a. **Participation and Inclusion:** NCHR conducts federal and provincial community consultation bringing marginalised voices (faith minorities, transpersons, women, children, persons with disabilities) into policy dialogue and awareness raising efforts.⁴
- b. **Non Discrimination and Equality:** Under its current leadership, NCHR has actively targeted systemic exclusion affecting gender, minority, and disability groups. The 2024 Annual Report notes the Commission's role in juvenile justice reform, leading to the release of approximately 130 under-

³ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Human Rights-Based Approach to Sustainable Development*, UN SDG. <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/human-rights-based-approach>

⁴ Business Recorder, *Human Rights-Based Approach: 'State's Vision Not Fully Aligned With SDGs'*, December 11, 2021. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40139418>

trial juvenile detainees and facilitating legal representation for many.⁵ Its "Unequal Citizens" fact-finding report addressed misuse of minority quotas, prompting government action to ban discriminatory public sector hiring ads and ensure fair implementation. Further, NCHR chairperson is credited with advancing prison and juvenile justice reforms, including developing of a 'Torture at Adiala Jail' report and shaping policy on women inmates, work described as central to her mandate.⁶

- c. **Accountability and Rule of Law:** NCHR exercises its complaint redressal powers meticulously. It holds inquiries, initiates investigations both on complaints and suo motu, conducts unannounced jail inspections, and intervenes in human rights litigation to connect victims with the justice system. According to data provided to the UN Human Rights Committee, since its re establishment in 2015, the Commission has received 7,080 complaints, conducted 173 jail visits and 28 fact-finding missions, and published 50 special reports.⁷
- d. **Transparency and Disaggregated Data:** The Commission maintains complaint databases, produces human rights research, issues independent and incisive reports to the government, and especially advocates for data driven monitoring.
- e. **Universality of Rights:** NCHR's mandate spans civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights: from work on transgender rights and torture reporting to juvenile justice and business rights frameworks.

HRBA strengthens the National Commission for Human Rights' mandate by translating abstract commitments into enforceable action. While the Sustainable Development Goals rely on voluntary compliance, HRBA allows the NCHR to anchor development commitments in binding legal obligations, thereby serving as a tool for enforceable policy change and institutional accountability. It also enables the Commission to go beyond surface-level indicators by identifying structural causes behind Pakistan's development gaps and shaping its recommendations accordingly.

Moreover, HRBA is not external to NCHR's functioning; it is embedded within the Commission's legal framework under the NCHR Act and its governance framework. The Commission's authority to investigate violations, provide policy advice, intervene in litigation, gather data, and engage with affected

⁵ National Commission for Human Rights (Pakistan), *Annual Report 2024*, April 2025. <https://nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Annual-Report-2024.pdf>

⁶ Wikipedia. Rabiya Javeri Agha. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabiya_Javeri_Agha

⁷ <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?file=EnglishTranslation&filename=10804>

communities independently reflects the operational application of HRBA principles across all areas of its work.

Pakistan's Integrated Approaches: Progress, Challenges, and Best Practices

Pakistan has demonstrated a commitment to integrating human rights within its pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The country's approach has involved administrative, policy and legislative alignment, alongside concrete programmatic interventions, though these efforts are met with challenges.

A. Policy and Legislative Alignment

Pakistan was an early adopter of the 2030 Agenda, committing to its vision in 2015 and becoming the first country globally to integrate the SDGs into its national development agenda through a unanimous National Assembly Resolution in February 2016. This commitment has been operationalised by mainstreaming the SDGs into core national policies and strategies, including the Five-Year Plan⁸ and various provincial growth strategies.⁹

To facilitate implementation and oversight, federal and provincial SDG units have been established. These units, alongside Parliamentary Task forces, are designed to oversee progress, foster inter-agency coordination, and strengthen collaborations with a diverse range of stakeholders, including development partners, civil society organisations, think tanks, academia, and the private sector.¹⁰

In addition, Pakistan has undertaken several strategic actions to advance SDG implementation:

- a. **National SDG Framework:** In 2018, Pakistan developed a National SDG Framework that sets country-specific targets and identifies priority indicators aligned with national development needs.¹¹

⁸ Federal SDGs Support Unit, Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives. Pakistan SDGs Status Report. 2021. https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/Pak_SDGs_Status_Report_2021.pdf

⁹ Government of Pakistan. *Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Review*. 2019. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/233812019_06_15_VNR_2019_Pakistan_latest_version.pdf

¹⁰ International Institute for Sustainable Development. Stakeholders Report on SDG Progress and Challenges in Pakistan. 2018. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/stakeholders-report-on-sdg-progress-and-challenges-in-pakistan/>

¹¹ Government of Pakistan, *Summary for the National Economic Council (NEC): SDGs National Framework 2018*, Planning Commission. https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/National_SDGs_Framework_-_NEC_2018.pdf

- b. **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs):** Pakistan has submitted two VNRs to the United Nations (in 2019 and 2021), showcasing its progress, challenges, and policy responses related to SDG implementation.¹²
- c. **Provincial and Local Integration:** Given its devolved governance structure, Pakistan has emphasized localising the SDGs by embedding them into provincial Annual Development Plans (ADPs) and establishing provincial SDG monitoring and coordination mechanisms.¹³
- d. **Data and Monitoring Initiatives:** Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), in collaboration with development partners, has been working to align national statistical systems with SDG indicators, including the development of an SDG Dashboard to improve public access to SDG data.¹⁴
- e. **Financing for Development:** Efforts have been made to align public sector development budgets with SDG priorities, including exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships and SDG-aligned budgeting at provincial levels.¹⁵
- f. **Policy Initiatives Aligned with SDGs:** Programs like Ehsaas (now subsumed under BISP),¹⁶ Kamyab Jawan,¹⁷ Sehat Sahulat,¹⁸ and Clean Green Pakistan¹⁹ are directly aligned with SDG goals such as poverty reduction, health, youth empowerment, and climate resilience.

A significant reform in this regard is also the reformulation of the Planning Commission Form-1 (PC-1). The PC-1, a primary planning tool for all government agencies, has been revised to integrate SDG targets into the design, planning, budgeting, and implementation of government projects. This ensures that project results are systematically measured and reported in alignment with national and global SDG progress.²⁰

¹² See footnote 9. For the 2022 review, see <https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/VNR-v9.pdf>.

¹³ See footnote 9.

¹⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁵ Government of Pakistan & UNDP, Policy Support for Mainstreaming Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/projects/policy-support-mainstreaming-sustainable-development-goals-pakistan>

¹⁶ United Nations Pakistan, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023–2027 (Abridged Version)*. 2024. https://minio.dev.devqube.io/uninfo-production-main/9aa936ad-a2bd-4284-9538-61bcb13e5fa3_Pakistan_UNSDCF_Final.pdf

¹⁷ UN Pakistan, *Common Country Analysis: Pakistan CCA Final 2020–21*. https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b357260a-1727-4366-bf98-e22475f2d619_CCA_Pakistan_final_2020-21.pdf

¹⁸ UN, *Sustainable Development Platform: Member State Profile – Pakistan*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/pakistan>

¹⁹ Clean Green Pakistan. <https://cleangreen.gov.pk/aboutus>

²⁰ Asian Development Bank, *Integrating Sustainable Development Goals into Projects in Pakistan: A Case Study*, Development Asia. <https://development.asia/case-study/integrating-sustainable-development-goals-projects-pakistan>

Additionally, the Planning Ministry's incorporation of a Disability Impact Assessment (DIA) into the PC-1 template marks a significant development in embedding accessibility considerations within Pakistan's project planning processes.²¹ This move reflects growing awareness of the need to mainstream disability rights in development frameworks. This is consistent with broader policy directions. For example, the Sindh Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy 2023 explicitly calls for the consideration of DIA in planning and resettlement procedures, signalling a shift toward disability-inclusive infrastructure and service delivery.²² NCHR's mandate now involves institutionalising the DIA framework. The Commission aims to engage in compliance monitoring to ensure that PC-1 documents meaningfully assess and mitigate accessibility barriers. Tracking the effectiveness of DIA over time and documenting gaps could further contribute to policy accountability and long-term structural inclusion.

These actions reflect Pakistan's intent to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the 2030 Agenda, though substantial gaps remain in implementation, particularly in financing, institutional capacity, and data quality.

B. Concrete Examples of Implementation

Pakistan's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, guided by human rights principles, are evident across several key SDG areas, though progress remains uneven.

1. Delivering on "Leave No One Behind" (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.a)

Pakistan has initiated various programs aimed at fulfilling the commitment to "leave no one behind," particularly focusing on vulnerable segments of society. Social protection schemes, such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP),²³ Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF),²⁴ and Pakistan Baitul Mal (PBM),²⁵ are in place to provide support to vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities (PWDs). In the education sector, efforts have been made to ensure access for PWDs through inclusive schools and free education at public

²¹ Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan, *Brief on Disability Rights in Pakistan*. <https://www.mohr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/briefDisability.pdf>

²² Planning and Development Department, Government of Sindh, *Sindh SDGs Support Unit – Background and Implementation Framework*. <https://pnd.sindh.gov.pk/storage/tenders/ooQrntso5y1VFZ9iXOUwBAhmSVAeD2ORNYW89H3L.pdf>

²³ UNDP, *Development Advocate Pakistan: Data for Development*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, April 2024. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-04/dap_-_volume_11_issue_1_-_data_for_development_web-only.pdf

²⁴ PPAF. <https://www.ppaf.org.pk/about>

²⁵ Official Website. <https://www.pbm.gov.pk/>

institutions, with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) developing an inclusive policy. To enhance employment opportunities, a job quota of 2% (with some provincial legislations increasing it to 5%) has been allocated for PWDs in public and private sectors, and they are eligible to take the Central Superior Service (CSS) exam.²⁶

In addition, the Ehsaas programme (now under BISP) introduced targeted initiatives like Kafaalat and Nashonuma to address child nutrition, maternal health, and cash transfers for the ultra-poor, especially women and children in remote regions.²⁷

Pakistan has also implemented the Sehat Sahulat Program, a health insurance initiative aimed at providing free inpatient health services to underprivileged families, contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Furthermore, laws and policies have been introduced to address discrimination and protect minority rights, aligning with international principles like the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), including initiatives to restore religious sites. The establishment of the National Commission for the Rights of the Child (NCRC)²⁸ and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)²⁹ further reflects Pakistan's institutional commitment to promoting equality and monitoring the rights of vulnerable groups.

At the provincial level, several inclusive initiatives have been undertaken, such as Punjab's Khidmat Card³⁰ for financial support to PWDs and Sindh's Disability Council to coordinate disability rights efforts, highlighting localised action on SDG targets. Pakistan has also partnered with international organisations to promote inclusive urban planning, disaster risk reduction, and gender equality through programs supported by UNDP, UNICEF, and UN Women.

Despite these commendable policy and programmatic initiatives, a significant gap exists between policy intent and the lived reality for many vulnerable populations. The UNDP's 2023 Integrated SDG Insights Report indicates that Pakistan is currently on track to meet only 35 out of 169 SDG targets, highlighting "stark disparities" in critical human development indicators such as maternal mortality, the number of out-of-school children, and access to clean drinking

²⁶ International Disability Alliance, *Final Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan*. https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/pakistan_final_report-final_1.docx

²⁷ Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Government of Pakistan, Official Website. <https://www.pass.gov.pk/>

²⁸ Website: <https://ncrc.gov.pk/>

²⁹ Website: <https://ncsw.gov.pk/index>

³⁰ Punjab Social Protection Authority, List of Services, e-Khidmat Portal. <https://ekhidmat.punjab.gov.pk/pspa-services>

water.³¹ This suggests that while the foundational frameworks are in place, their effective implementation and their ability to reach the "furthest behind" are insufficient.

NCHR's own reports on specific vulnerable groups, such as the Ahmadiyya Situation Report, The Issue of Bonded Labour in Pakistan, and The Plight of Afghan Refugees Incarcerated in Central Prison, Karachi, provide granular evidence of these persistent gaps. These reports suggest that systemic issues, inadequate resource allocation, or deeply entrenched discriminatory practices may still prevent the full realisation of rights for all. NCHR's role is therefore important in consistently highlighting this discrepancy and advocating for more targeted, rights-based interventions that address the root causes of exclusion.³²

2. Eradicating Poverty and Tackling Inequalities (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.b)

Pakistan has undertaken legal reforms to strengthen its criminal justice system, including the enactment of the Protection of Women Act and the Anti-Rape Ordinance. Reforms in family law, such as the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961, which aim to promote gender equality and protect women's rights within the family system. Increased awareness campaigns, the establishment of specialised agencies, and a rise in women's representation in parliamentary, provincial, and local councils have been observed. UN Women Pakistan, for instance, focuses on strengthening normative frameworks, promoting innovative gender financing, protecting against harmful practices, and raising awareness. Its programs include organising women into groups, providing vocational and digital literacy training, and conducting legal rights awareness initiatives.³³

NCHR has actively contributed to these efforts through reports like Upholding Inclusivity: Minority Rights Initiatives 2022-2023 and Unequal Citizens: Ending Systemic Discrimination against Minorities.³⁴

In regards to religious freedoms, the National Commission for Human Rights' 2024 report documents the escalation of blasphemy-related violence across Pakistan, drawing attention to patterns of mob attacks, misuse of legal provisions, and a lack of proper accountability by law enforcement agencies.

³¹ UNDP Pakistan, *Summit of the Future 2024: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow*.

<https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/summit-future-2024-multilateral-solutions-better-tomorrow>

³² NCHR Reports. <https://nchr.gov.pk/nchr-reports/>

³³ UN Women Asia and the Pacific, *Legislation on Violence Against Women in Pakistan*.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan/evaw-pakistan/legislation-on-vaw>

³⁴ NCHR Press Release Archive: https://nchr.gov.pk/press_release/test/

The report also highlights how laws are routinely applied in vague and coercive ways.³⁵

Despite the existence of legal frameworks, with 77.8% of legal frameworks promoting, enforcing, and monitoring gender equality reported to be in place, significant gender gaps persist. For example, as of February 2024, women hold only 20.5% of seats in parliament, indicating a substantial gender gap in political empowerment. Violence against women remains a pressing concern, with 16.2% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 reporting physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in 2018.³⁶

This situation reveals a significant implementation and enforcement gap. While Pakistan has enacted numerous laws and policies aimed at gender equality and minority protection, the data indicates persistent violence against women, low political representation, and ongoing discrimination and violence against minorities, often exacerbated by the misuse of laws. This points to the critical reality that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without robust enforcement, accountability for perpetrators, and fundamental societal change to address deeply entrenched discriminatory and patriarchal norms. This suggests a need for a shift from *de jure* (in law) equality to *de facto* (in practice) equality.

Moreover, the challenges faced by women and girls in disaster contexts, often linked to their unequal access to resources, and the mention of discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, religion, and disability, underscore the intersectional nature of inequality. Inequalities are not isolated but frequently intersect, compounding vulnerabilities. For instance, a woman from a religious minority with a disability may face multiple layers of discrimination. NCHR's reports on specific groups, such as the Ahmadiyya community or ethnic Hazaras,³⁷ implicitly address these compounded vulnerabilities. This highlights the fact that integrated approaches must be intersectional, recognising that addressing one form of discrimination can positively impact others, and that a failure to do so will inevitably leave significant populations behind, thereby hindering overall SDG progress.

Nevertheless, at least in regards to gender equality, recent figures suggest a gradual shift towards better parity in higher education and professional sectors in Pakistan, particularly within medicine. While gender-disaggregated data from

³⁵ NCHR, *Ahmadiyya Report: Rising Attacks on Places of Worship and Legal Discrimination*, 2024. <https://nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Ahmadiya-Report.pdf>

³⁶ UN Women Data Hub, Pakistan – *Gender Equality Data & Statistics*. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/pakistan>

³⁷ NCHR, *Understanding the Agonies of Ethnic Hazaras: A Human Rights Perspective*, 2023. <https://nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Understanding-the-Agonies-of-Ethnic-Hazaras.pdf>

the Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC) remains limited, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council has noted that women comprise nearly 70 percent of medical school enrolments. However, only about half of them proceed to register as doctors, with even fewer continuing in active practice. In dentistry, 32,237 professionals were registered in 2022, though no gender-specific breakdown is publicly available. According to UNESCO, women now make up 47 percent of all bachelor's degree students in Pakistan. In medical sciences, female students account for approximately 45 percent of the enrolment. These figures point to a narrowing gender gap in access to education and professional training, even as retention and long-term participation remain challenges.

3. Fiscal Policy and Human Rights (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.c)

The call for input explicitly invites examples of efforts to integrate human rights obligations into budgets and fiscal policy, aiming to tackle inequalities and ensure the maximum available resources are utilised for health, education, social protection, and other human rights. Discussions at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) have underscored the necessity of transforming economic policies to reduce inequalities and advance human rights and environmental sustainability, including the integration of pre-existing human rights obligations into economic policy planning and inclusive budgeting.³⁸

A significant challenge for Pakistan in this regard is the substantial financial commitment required to achieve the 2030 Agenda. According to UNDP's Integrated SDG Insights Report 2023, Pakistan needs a "substantial 'SDG Push'" requiring an additional 16.1% of its GDP to meet the Agenda 2030 targets.³⁹ This creates a direct causal link between fiscal space and human rights realisation. Insufficient fiscal space directly impedes the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights, such as the rights to health, education, and social protection.

Pakistan's commitment to the 2030 Agenda will largely remain aspirational unless a critical resource gap is addressed through both domestic policy reforms and enhanced international cooperation. As Atiya Waris, the UN Special Rapporteur on external debt and human rights, has pointed out, countries in the Global South like Pakistan often face structural constraints due to unsustainable

³⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *SDG 16 Expert Group Meeting Summary Report – HLPF 2024*. https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/HLPF%202024_SDG%2016%20EGM%20Summary_FINAL_0.pdf

³⁹ UN Pakistan, *Bold Action to Rescue the SDGs in Pakistan*, 2023. <https://pakistan.un.org/en/287069-bold-action-rescue-sdgs-pakistan>

debt burdens, limiting their ability to invest in rights-based development.⁴⁰ In such circumstances she rightly argues that international financial systems must be restructured to allow borrowing countries the fiscal space necessary to meet their human rights obligations, including through debt relief, fairer lending practices, and global financial reform. This perspective reinforces the need for aligning macroeconomic frameworks with human rights commitments, ensuring that debt servicing does not come at the expense of fundamental rights.

4. Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.d)

Pakistan has shown proactive engagement in addressing environmental challenges and climate change. The country is recognised as "on track" for SDG 13 (Climate Action), attributed to various policies and initiatives such as 'Clean and Green Pakistan,' 'Ten Billion Tree Tsunami,' 'Protected Areas Initiative,' and 'Recharge Pakistan'.⁴¹ The 'Living Indus' initiative further exemplifies this commitment by focusing on ecosystem restoration, pollution reduction, and sustainable water management.⁴² Institutionally, Pakistan has strengthened its environmental protection agencies, established environmental courts, and introduced National Environment Quality Standards.⁴³ The country also actively engages in climate diplomacy, advocating for increased global financing and technological support at international forums like COP29, where it introduced the National Climate Finance Strategy (NCFS) to bridge a substantial \$348 billion funding gap by 2030.⁴⁴

Despite these efforts, Pakistan faces an existential threat from climate change, ranking 5th on the Global Climate Risk Index. It is disproportionately affected by climate-induced disasters such as floods and heatwaves, and experiences severe water scarcity, despite contributing only 0.88% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Challenges such as fossil fuel dependency, deforestation, and limited investments in renewable energy continue to hinder progress. Furthermore, Pakistan faces critical water stress, with a level of 116% in 2020, and is the fourth

⁴⁰ OHCHR, *Special Rapporteur on Foreign Debt and Other Related International Financial Obligations of States on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-foreign-debt>

⁴¹ Syed Abu Ahmad Akif, *Pakistan's 'Super Year' for Nature*, The European Journal, New Direction. https://newdirection.online/the-european-journal/article/pakistans_super_year_for_nature

⁴² United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Restoring the Indus: Pakistan's Lifeline*, 2023. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/restoring-indus-pakistans-lifeline>

⁴³ UNDP Pakistan, *Pakistan Environmental Report 2025*. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/environmental_report-complete_02_0.pdf

⁴⁴ Express Tribune, *Localisation of SDG 13: Climate Diplomacy and Green Economy*, 24 May 2024. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2521518/localisation-of-sdg-13-climate-diplomacy-and-green-economy>

largest user of groundwater globally, leading to a widening supply-demand gap.⁴⁵

Moreover, Pakistan is facing a deepening water crisis, with projections by the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources indicating that the country may reach absolute water scarcity by 2025. The International Monetary Fund has ranked Pakistan among the top three countries most vulnerable to water shortages. This situation poses a significant challenge to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, particularly in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, and Goal 2 on zero hunger.⁴⁶

Pakistan relies on the Indus Basin system for approximately 94 percent of its agricultural irrigation, about 20 percent of its power generation, and as a primary source for both groundwater recharge and urban water supply.⁴⁷ Recent upstream interventions, such as flow reductions and reservoir-flushing operations, have intensified water stress in downstream regions, highlighting the need for robust, transparent, and cooperative water governance. Any disruption to the agreed allocation of the Indus Basin's annual flow, around 80 percent of which is designated to Pakistan under the Indus Water Treaty 1960, risks undermining climate resilience, food security, and public health, particularly for vulnerable populations dependent on river-based livelihoods.⁴⁸ Strengthening institutional monitoring, early warning systems, and integrated water resource management must therefore remain central to national strategies aligned with the 2030 Agenda.⁴⁹

According to NCHR, an "integrated approach" must aspire to achieve tangible, rights-protective outcomes, stressing upon the human rights dimension of climate justice and the urgent need for international support for adaptation, as well as addressing loss and damage. The Commission recognises the significant human rights impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to early and forced marriage, internal displacement, gender-based violence, labour rights, and even imprisonment. These risks are often amplified during climate-induced

⁴⁵ Dawn, *Why Has Pakistan Not Declared a Climate Emergency?*, 3 June 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1908581>

⁴⁶ Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), *Water Crisis in Pakistan: Manifestation, Causes, and the Way Forward*, 2024. <https://pide.org.pk/research/water-crisis-in-pakistan-manifestation-causes-and-the-way-forward>

⁴⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Pakistan: *Irrigation and Drainage*, AQUASTAT Survey, 1997. <https://www.fao.org/4/ac623e/ac623e0i.htm>

⁴⁸ Armani Syed, *India and Pakistan's Water Supply Is Shrinking Fast. Climate Change Is Making It Worse*, TIME, 4 June 2024. <https://time.com/7284470/india-pakistan-water-supply-climate-change>

⁴⁹ World Bank, *Managing Groundwater Resources in Pakistan's Indus Basin*, 25 March 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/25/managing-groundwater-resources-in-pakistan-indus-basin>

disasters, as seen during the 2022 floods, where NCHR played an active role in monitoring and addressing such violations. In collaboration with disaster management bodies such as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs), the Commission engaged with affected communities and raised concerns regarding protection risks faced by vulnerable groups, especially women, children, and transgender persons. A key administrative response during this period came from the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), which took timely steps to re-issue lost identification documents, particularly Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs), facilitating access to relief and state services. These efforts underscore the intersections between climate resilience, human rights protection, and institutional responsiveness.

Furthermore, at the federal level, efforts include social media and public advocacy campaigns and several consultations. Broader engagement on climate-related issues has largely been led by the Punjab provincial office. Notably, the Commission contributed to the inclusion of transgender persons in the National Disaster Management Authority's disaster prevention policy: a first in national policy formulation.⁵⁰ In addition, the Commission has addressed environmental concerns through targeted interventions.

The Punjab office has sent formal communications regarding pollution-related issues, including a complaint from a small town concerning water contamination allegedly caused by a nearby factory. In response to the escalating environmental crisis, NCHR Punjab undertook significant interventions throughout 2024, recognising the right to a clean and healthy environment as a fundamental human right. With Lahore ranking among the most polluted cities globally and smog levels reaching hazardous extremes, NCHR Punjab, led by Member Nadeem Ashraf, initiated a suo moto inquiry in November. The hearing involved senior officials and stressed the need for a scientific study to trace the causes of persistent smog, with a focus on fuel quality, vehicle emissions, particularly from motorcycles, crop burning, and industrial non-compliance. Parallely, NCHR addressed environmental complaints from residents of Basti Ghareebabad, District Rahim Yar Khan, concerning pollution linked to the Rahim Yar Khan Sugar Mills. The Commission issued directives to operationalise the wastewater treatment plant, complete infrastructural measures to prevent water contamination, clear ash from the village pathway, and activate the dispensary. These orders were reinforced through coordination with the Environment

⁵⁰ PreventionWeb, *Pakistan's Trans Community Battles Climate Catastrophe and Exclusion*, 2022. <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/pakistans-trans-community-battles-climate-catastrophe-and-exclusion>

Protection Department (EPD) and law enforcement to prevent retaliation. Subsequent compliance led to concrete improvements: installation of a new filtration plant, restoration of electricity, functional healthcare services, and submission of a compliance report by the sugar mills. The April 19 directive from Member Punjab reiterated the need for EPD to expedite infrastructural fixes, underlining the link between environmental governance and public health. Residents of Basti Ghareebabad later expressed their satisfaction with the outcomes, crediting NCHR's intervention for tangible improvements in their quality of life.⁵¹

NCHR urges that climate action and environmental policies must explicitly integrate human rights dimensions, focusing on equitable access and sustainable management of resources to prevent further human rights violations and ensure the well-being of all citizens.

5. Strengthening Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.e)

Pakistan has made efforts to strengthen its legal frameworks and enhance judicial systems, including legislative reforms to the criminal justice system such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Protection of Women Act, and the Anti-Rape Ordinance. Improvements have been made in Case Management Systems, with the digitisation of case files and the development of digital case management systems aimed at expediting justice delivery. Legal aid is being provided by the recent set up of institutions such as Legal Aid & Justice Authority (LAJA).⁵² Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation centers, are also being promoted to reduce the burden on formal courts.⁵³ Awareness campaigns educate citizens about their rights and legal processes, with programs like the Punjab Access to Justice Program⁵⁴ and the Sindh Legal Empowerment and Assistance Program⁵⁵ providing legal aid to vulnerable populations.

In April 2025, NCHR, in collaboration with the European Union and UNDP, convened a national conference titled "From Promise to Action: Advancing SDG 16 for Justice and Reform." This conference brought together a broad range of

⁵¹ See footnote 5.

⁵² National Assembly of Pakistan, *The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2022*.
https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/679866e0bce08_199.pdf

⁵³ The Legal Rights Forum, *Effectiveness of Alternative Dispute Resolution in Pakistan*, September 2024.
<https://the-legal.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Effectiveness-of-Alternative-Dispute-Resolution-in-Pakistan.pdf>

⁵⁴ Planning and Development Board, Government of Punjab, *Annual Judicial Performance Report 2008*.
<https://pnd.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/AJP08.pdf>

⁵⁵ Legal Aid Society, *Strengthening Legal Aid and Community Capacity (SLACC) Report* – July to December 2022. <https://www.las.org.pk/media/pdfs/rpandp/SLACC-2023-Jul-Dec-2022-R.pdf>

stakeholders, including senior officials from the police, judiciary, prison administration, civil society, and development partners, to deliberate on systemic reforms required to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions. The discussions focused on key areas of the criminal justice system, policing, judicial reform, and prison conditions, with particular attention to the rights of vulnerable populations including women, children, and religious minorities.⁵⁶

The conference marked a shift from rhetorical commitments to concrete strategies for rights-based institutional reform. Participants examined structural issues such as pre-trial detention, custodial torture, access to legal aid, and the absence of accountability mechanisms in law enforcement agencies. A significant milestone highlighted during the conference was NCHR's A-status accreditation by GANHRI.⁵⁷ This accreditation confirms the Commission's full compliance with the Paris Principles and affirms its operational independence, credibility, and authority to engage with international human rights mechanisms. It also positions NCHR, not only as a watchdog, but also as a convener and driver of institutional change in Pakistan's justice architecture. Additionally, NCHR's 'A' status affirms Pakistan's compliance with SDG 16.a.1 which is the "existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles."⁵⁸

Despite the above successes, important institutional reforms and ongoing policy efforts, however, Pakistan's criminal justice system continues to face structural challenges that hinder access to justice and the full realisation of SDG 16. According to the 2024 World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, Pakistan ranked 129th out of 142 countries, indicating the need for sustained focus on institutional strengthening.⁵⁹ Key barriers include case backlogs, delayed trials, outdated legal procedures, limited access to legal aid, and gaps in coordination across justice sector institutions. Prison overcrowding remains a concern, with

⁵⁶ UNDP Pakistan, *Justice System Reform in Focus at National Human Rights Conference*, 12 April 2024. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/justice-system-reform-focus-national-human-rights-conference>

⁵⁷ Dawn, *CJP Calls for Truth*, Reconciliation Commission, 14 May 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1834333>

⁵⁸ Our Data for Development (ODD) Dashboard, *Indicator 16.a.1: Existence of Independent National Human Rights Institutions in Compliance with the Paris Principles*. <https://odd-dashboard.cd/en/16-a-1/>

⁵⁹ World Justice Project, *Pakistan Ranks 129 out of 140 in Rule of Law Index*. <https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/Pakistan.pdf>

detention facilities operating at over 150% capacity and a significant proportion of the prison population comprising under-trial detainees.⁶⁰

Concerns have also been raised by independent monitors and civil society actors regarding custodial conditions, reports of torture, and the treatment of vulnerable groups in detention.⁶¹ NCHR's own investigations and prison monitoring visits have repeatedly highlighted the need for improved compliance with due process guarantees and humane detention standards.⁶²

In this context, NCHR continues to advocate for rights-based reforms grounded in Pakistan's constitutional and international human rights obligations. This includes promoting legal aid provision, alternatives to incarceration, police accountability mechanisms, and the protection of civic space as integral components of a just and effective rule of law framework.

While the current government has invested in judicial reform, digitalisation, and institutional strengthening allowing NCHR to operate independently without interference, the human rights situation in Pakistan still has a long way to go. The persistence of issues like gender based violence, the misuse of blasphemy laws, and arbitrary detentions demonstrates that the "rule of law" extends beyond merely having laws. It encompasses their just and equitable application and the protection of fundamental freedoms. NCHR's role is to highlight how these practices undermine the human rights principles embedded in SDG 16, particularly non-discrimination and accountability, and to advocate for reforms that address the spirit of the law, not just its letter.

6. Advances in Partnerships and Data (SDG 17) (aligned with HRC 52/14, Q.f)

Pakistan has actively sought to strengthen collaborations with various stakeholders, including development partners, civil society organisations, think tanks, academia, and the private sector, to advance SDG implementation.⁶³ The Government of Pakistan has set up and empowered specialised commissions such as NCRC, NCSW, the National Commission on Minorities (just recently passed by the Parliament)⁶⁴ and the NCHR. Additionally, and commendably,

⁶⁰ Justice Project Pakistan (JPP), *Prison Reform*, Pakistan Justice Project. <https://www.jpp.org.pk/prison-reform>

⁶¹ JPP and The Advocates for Human Rights, *Submission for CAT List of Issues*, 2022. <https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/JPP%20and%20TAHR%20Submission%20for%20CAT%20List%20of%20Issues.pdf>

⁶² NCHR, *Report on Torture at Adiala Jail*, 2022. <https://nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Report-on-Torture-at-Adiala-Jail.pdf>

⁶³ UNDP Pakistan, *Government of Pakistan, UNDP Convene SDGs Policy Dialogue to Fast-Track Agenda 2030*, press release from May 2025. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/government-pakistan-undp-convene-sdgs-policy-dialogue-fast-track-agenda-2030>

⁶⁴ Dawn, *Bill to establish commission for minority rights approved by Senate subcommittee*, April 17

Pakistan has set up a Transgender Protection Center providing for the protection, support, legal assistance and rights of transgender persons.⁶⁵

In the implementation of the SDGs is a growing understanding within the country that the disaggregation of data is crucial for ensuring inclusiveness and preventing discrimination, particularly for migrants and other vulnerable groups. Efforts to improve data collection and monitoring include the development of a national SDGs index. Additionally, NADRA has made notable progress in increasing the registration of women, particularly through targeted drives in low-coverage districts. NCHR has engaged with NADRA to raise concerns about gender gaps in legal identity, especially in the context of access to relief, inheritance, and state services.⁶⁶ During field visits and investigations, particularly in post-disaster settings such as the 2022 floods, the Commission identified the lack of CNICs among women as a major barrier to accessing aid. In response, NCHR coordinated with NADRA to facilitate mobile registration units in affected areas and has since continued to advocate for sustained, gender-sensitive registration efforts. NCHR facilitated NADRA mobile registration units in affected areas to expedite CNIC issuance for women. NADRA also partnered with the Ministry of Human Rights to register over 100 children in Bari Imam, ensuring their legal identity and access to essential services.⁶⁷

Significant challenges however remain in data collection and disaggregation. The UN Women Data Hub indicates that as of December 2020, only 49.1% of the indicators needed to monitor SDGs from a gender perspective were available in Pakistan.⁶⁸ Critical gaps exist in key areas such as the gender pay gap, gender and poverty, and women's access to assets. Many areas also lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring. Globally, reporting on migration-specific SDG indicators or disaggregating other indicators by migratory status remains a challenge for most countries.

Pakistan has included the Washington Questions in both its National Census and the Health and Demographic Survey and set up an executive body known as Council for Protection of Rights of Disabled Persons (CRPD) which provides

2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1904861>

⁶⁵ UNDP Pakistan, *Promoting Inclusion and Protection: Pakistan's National Strategic Framework for Transgender Persons*, 2024. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/blog/promoting-inclusion-and-protection-pakistans-national-strategic-framework-transgender-persons>

⁶⁶ Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan SDGs Status Report 2023*, Planning Commission. <https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/Pakistan%20SDGs%20Status%20Report%202023.pdf>

⁶⁷ Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan, *Child Protection Institute Marks World Children's Day 2024*, News Detail, November 20, 2024.

<https://www.mohr.gov.pk/NewsDetail/YzgYnJFiOTgtNDhhZS00ODY5LTgzZTktNTI4NWYyMGI3ZjVm>

⁶⁸ See footnote 36.

both support and data on persons with disabilities in Pakistan.⁶⁹ This council however, needs further strengthening, especially since lack of good quality disability data is a serious barrier to proactively planning for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Data deficiency represents a fundamental barrier to achieving the "leave no one behind" principle. The principle necessitates accurately identifying and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Without robust, disaggregated data, it becomes impossible to precisely determine who is being left behind, where resources are most critically needed, and whether interventions are genuinely effective. This directly undermines accountability and severely hinders the ability to formulate human rights-based policies. NCHR's submissions emphasise that urgent investment in statistical capacity and rights-based data collection is paramount to ensure that development efforts genuinely benefit all segments of society and to hold duty-bearers accountable for their commitments.

C. Role of NCHR in National Implementation

NCHR occupies a foundational position within Pakistan's human rights and sustainable development architecture. As an A-status National Human Rights Institution, the NCHR is both a watch dog and a strategic partner in ensuring that the country's development trajectory remains anchored in the principles of justice, dignity, and equality for all.

- **Mandated Monitoring and Investigations:** Established under the NCHR Act of 2012, the Commission is entrusted with independent monitoring and investigation of human rights violations. This mandate is executed through robust fieldwork, evidence-based inquiry, and engagement with affected communities. In recent years, the NCHR has produced landmark reports on issues ranging from conditions in detention facilities, misuse of blasphemy laws, bonded and child labour, and violations against minority communities. These interventions are not only diagnostic but also catalytic, informing legal reform, shaping public discourse, and advancing institutional accountability. Several of NCHR reports have also become part of Pakistan's human rights jurisprudence. They also initiated positive response from the government eg. NCHR report on 'Unequal

⁶⁹ Asian Development Bank, *ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020 (Pakistan)*, Law and Policy Reform Program, July 2024. <https://lpr.adb.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/pakistan-ict-rights-of-persons-with-disability-act-2020.pdf>

citizens' documenting discrimination in hiring of minorities led to a nationwide government ban on discriminatory hiring. NCHR report on 'Torture in Adiala Jail' led to massive reshuffle, dismissal and disciplinary action against numerous prison officials, including the set up of a Jail Implementation Commission under the Minister of Human Rights. These reports are a part of the annexure below.

- **Strategic Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** The Commission's role extends far beyond documentation. It serves as an institutional conscience for the state, offering strategic guidance to the Government of Pakistan on fulfilling its obligations under the Constitution and international human rights treaties. NCHR's advocacy draws strength from research, consultations, and evidence-based recommendations. Whether advising on legislative amendments such as those on torture, domestic violence, and death penalty, or raising alarms over systemic discrimination, the Commission acts with independence and rigour, ensuring that policy and practice remain responsive to rights-based imperatives.
- **Engagement with International Mechanisms:** NCHR international work is equally vital. The NCHR has made substantive contributions to Pakistan's engagements with global human rights mechanisms, including UPR and treaty bodies such as the CERD, CRC and ICCPR, and plays an active role in the country's VNR processes under the 2030 Agenda. Through parallel reports and technical inputs, the Commission ensures that human rights are not peripheral but central to national development assessments. Additionally, the Chairperson of the NCHR Rabiya Agha has also been elected member of the Bureau of GANHRI.⁷⁰
- **Bridging State and Society:** NHRIs are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between the state and civil society. NCHR has signed MOUs with numerous CSOs and universities. Additionally, NCHR operationalises this role through national dialogues, thematic consultations, training and community-level outreach, facilitating participatory governance and inclusive policymaking. This bridging function is indispensable to realising the core ethos of the SDGs: to leave no one behind.
- **Accountability in the SDG Framework:** The 2030 Agenda lacks a binding accountability mechanism, relying largely on voluntary reporting. In this context, NCHR plays an irreplaceable role in strengthening the

⁷⁰ Dawn, *NCHR chief elected to global human rights body*, 12 March 2025.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1897290>

accountability ecosystem. As an independent statutory body with investigative powers, the Commission brings necessary rigour to the monitoring of SDG commitments. By explicitly linking its human rights reporting, including on torture, enforced disappearances, gender-based violence, and religious freedom, to relevant SDG indicators, the NCHR provides a framework for enforcement that complements the state's voluntary commitments.

In doing so, the Commission does not merely contribute to Pakistan's SDG progress; it anchors that progress in accountability, equity, and legal obligation. Development that is not rights-aligned is neither sustainable nor just. Through its work, the NCHR remains committed to ensuring that every step toward development is also a step toward justice.

Key Challenges, Gaps, and Lessons Learned

Pakistan's journey towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and upholding human rights is marked by significant progress but also by persistent and complex challenges. Understanding these barriers and drawing lessons from national and international experiences is a must for future acceleration.

Systemic Barriers and Persistent Vulnerabilities

Despite policy alignment and dedicated efforts, Pakistan continues to face many challenges that impede SDG performance and human development. UNDP's 2023 report indicates that the country is on track to meet only 35 out of 169 SDG targets, highlighting "stark disparities" in essential services such as maternal mortality, access to education, and clean drinking water.⁷¹

The Government of Pakistan is in the process of preparing a comprehensive package on judicial reform. In this package, 108 'people friendly' amendments are being made to the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to ensure safeguards for detention, bail reforms trial timelines and commitment to justice for marginalised litigants. The Minister of Law has also committed to incorporate recommendations arising out of NCHR's national stakeholder conference on Access to Justice within this reform program.⁷²

As it stands today however, the criminal justice system remains a significant area of concern, suffering from systemic barriers, delayed trials, archaic practices, and institutional inefficiencies. This is reflected in Pakistan's low ranking of 129th out of 142 countries globally in the 2024 World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index.⁷³ Compounding these systemic weaknesses are ongoing human rights violations, including reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, and harsh prison conditions.

Climate change poses an additional, existential threat to Pakistan, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities despite the country's policy efforts. Ranked 5th on the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan disproportionately bears the brunt of climate impacts, including devastating floods and heatwaves, despite its minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions.

⁷¹ See footnote 53.

⁷² See footnote 56.

⁷³ See footnote 59.

The observed patterns reveal a reinforcing cycle of human rights violations, and SDG stagnation. Institutional inefficiencies, limited public participation, and a weak rule of law contribute directly to persistent human rights violations.

These violations, in turn, disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, exacerbating existing inequalities. This creates a detrimental cycle where human rights deficits directly impede progress across various SDGs, particularly those related to poverty eradication (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

NCHR's role is to advocate for comprehensive governance reforms that prioritise human rights as foundational to sustainable development, recognising them not as separate objectives but as integral components.

Challenges in Data Collection, Disaggregation, and Monitoring (SDG 17)

A critical impediment to Pakistan's effective SDG implementation is the significant gap in the availability of high-quality, timely, and reliable disaggregated data. This is particularly evident for gender-specific indicators, data on poverty, and information pertaining to other vulnerable groups. For instance, as of December 2020, only 49.1% of the indicators necessary to monitor SDGs from a gender perspective were available in Pakistan, with notable deficiencies in areas like the gender pay gap, gender and poverty, and women's access to assets. As a federating country with devolved provincial systems, Pakistan faces added challenges in ensuring standardised data collection across all regions. There is no uniform methodology or centralised mechanism for collecting and reporting data, leading to discrepancies in both coverage and quality across provinces. While some provinces may have more advanced systems or stronger institutional capacities, others lag behind, making national-level aggregation inconsistent and unreliable. Many critical areas also lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring.

Urgent investment in statistical capacity and rights-based data collection is paramount to ensure that development efforts genuinely benefit all segments of society and to hold duty-bearers accountable for their commitments.

Lessons Learned from National Experiences and International Cooperation

Several key lessons have emerged from Pakistan's national experiences and its engagement with international cooperation:

- a. **Integration:** Effective implementation of the SDGs requires their comprehensive integration into national development plans and strategies.
- b. **Coordination:** Strengthening coordination mechanisms among diverse stakeholders (federal and provincial governments, civil society, private sector) is critical for coherent and systematic action.
- c. **Data and Monitoring:** Improving data collection and monitoring systems is indispensable for tracking progress effectively, identifying gaps, and informing policy adjustments.
- d. **Human Rights-Based Approach to Data:** The importance of a human rights-based approach to data collection and disaggregation is recognised as essential to ensure that no one is left behind, by identifying groups at risk and tailoring interventions.
- e. **Value of Voluntary National Reviews:** VNRs offer a valuable opportunity for human rights work at the country level, particularly when a human rights lens is integrated and NHRIs and civil society are actively involved.
- f. **Political Commitment:** While there appears to be political commitment in supporting programs aimed at poverty alleviation, women empowerment and strong national human rights institutions such as NCHR, NCSW, and NCRC, robust implementation mechanisms, comprehensive data, and a proactive and robust commitment to human rights principles, is essential for the actualisation of SDGs.

Key SDG Progress and Challenges in Pakistan (Human Rights Lens)

Selected SDG	Indicator	Status	Human Rights Dimension	Major Challenges
SDG 1: No Poverty	Proportion of population below poverty line	<u>On track for 35/169 targets (overall)</u>	Right to adequate standard of living, social protection	Implementation gap, resource allocation, structural inequalities
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Women in parliament, women in the civil service (now making up 50%), women in commissions, women in civil society	<p><u>20.5% of seats held by women (Feb 2024), all human rights commissions (NCRC, NCSW, NCHR) currently headed by women, all public sector organisations mandated to have at least 10% female representation on their boards</u></p> <p>In Parliament:⁷⁴</p> <p>Total Seats in National Assembly (NA): 336 Total reserved seats for women: 60 Women elected on general seats: 13 Vacant reserved seats: 41 Vacant seats of women against reserved seats: 19</p>	Equality and non-discrimination, participation in public life	Significant gender gap remains in political empowerment, violence against women still persists

⁷⁴ National Assembly of Pakistan. <https://www.na.gov.pk/en/content.php>

		Total women members (MNAs): 54 Percentage of Women in NA: 16.07 %		
SDG 6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Water stress level	116% water stress in 2020 (4th largest groundwater user globally) ⁷⁵	Right to water, health	Widening supply-demand gap, over-extraction of groundwater. International threats to Indus Water Treaty
SDG 13: Climate Action	Global Climate Risk Index ranking	Ranked 5th most vulnerable ⁷⁶	Right to a healthy environment, life, adequate standard of living	Disproportionate vulnerability to climate impacts, funding gap for adaptation
SDG 16: Peace, Justice, Strong Institutions	Rule of Law Index ranking	129th out of 142 countries globally (2024) ⁷⁷	Access to justice, rule of law, protection from torture, freedom of expression	Systemic barriers in justice system, delayed trials, gender based violence, restrictions on civic space
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Availability of gender-disaggregated data	Only 49.1% of gender indicators available (Dec 2020) ⁷⁸	Data for accountability, non-discrimination, "leave no one behind"	Significant data gaps, lack of comparable methodologies

⁷⁵ See footnote 45.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The News Pakistan, *Pakistan 129th out of 142 countries in Rule of Law index*, October 26, 2024.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1244078-pakistan-129th-out-of-142-countries-in-rule-of-law-index>

⁷⁸ See footnote 36.

Recommendations for Accelerated Progress by 2030

Based on the analysis of Pakistan's progress, challenges, and the inherent linkages between human rights and the 2030 Agenda, the following recommendations are put forth to accelerate integrated human rights and SDG implementation by 2030.

A. Strategic Policy and Legislative Reforms

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing national and provincial laws, particularly those related to freedom of expression, assembly, and religion (e.g., blasphemy laws, anti-terrorism acts), to ensure full alignment with international human rights standards and prevent their misuse against human rights defenders and minorities.
2. The current legal landscape, despite formal commitments, includes vague and overbroad laws that are frequently used to suppress dissent and target vulnerable groups, leading to documented human rights violations. This directly contradicts the principles of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) which calls for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, and the human rights-based approach principles of non-discrimination and participation. A thorough review and reform of these laws are essential to ensure that the legal environment actively enables human rights protection and SDG progress, rather than serving as a barrier. This moves beyond superficial compliance to substantive human rights protection, building trust and enabling greater civic participation.
3. Systematically integrate human rights obligations into national and provincial budgeting processes, ensuring maximum available resources are allocated to health, education, social protection, and other human rights-related sectors, with a particular focus on addressing disparities.
4. The call for input explicitly requests examples of efforts to integrate human rights into fiscal policy. Pakistan's current trajectory requires a significant "SDG Push" of an additional 16.1% of GDP to achieve its Agenda 2030 targets.⁷⁹ This highlights a clear resource gap that, if unaddressed, will severely impede the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights. Without dedicated and rights-based fiscal allocation, policies aimed at human rights and SDGs will lack the necessary funding for effective implementation, particularly for vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected by resource scarcity. This recommendation

⁷⁹ See footnote 62.

directly addresses the "maximum available resources" principle of economic, social, and cultural rights and ensures that financial planning becomes a deliberate tool for human rights realisation, not merely a reflection of economic growth.

B. Strengthening Institutional Capacities and Coordination

1. Enhance the capacity and independence of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to ensure fair trials, reduce case backlogs, expand legal aid and ADR, and protect the rights of detainees, particularly for vulnerable groups. This includes sustained investment in professional development and people-centered policies.
2. The current state of Pakistan's justice system, characterised by a low ranking in the Rule of Law Index,⁸⁰ prison overcrowding, delayed trials, and reports of torture and inhuman, degrading treatment directly undermines SDG 16. Strengthening these institutions is paramount for upholding the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice, which are core human rights. This recommendation focuses on systemic improvements that will have a direct positive impact on the human rights of citizens, moving beyond legislative reforms to practical, on-the-ground improvements in justice delivery. By investing in professional development and adopting people-centered policies, the justice system can become more responsive, efficient, and protective of human dignity.
3. Further strengthen NCHR's capacity and autonomy, ensuring adequate resources and protection against reprisals, enabling it to continue its vital role in monitoring, advocating, and providing independent oversight for human rights and SDG implementation.
4. NCHR's A-status accreditation is a significant asset for Pakistan's human rights and SDG agenda. National Human Rights Institutions are crucial for bridging the gap between international norms and national realities and for holding duty-bearers accountable. Reports indicate a concerning trend of threats and intimidation against NHRIs globally.⁸¹ Therefore, ensuring the NCHR's continued independence, adequate resourcing, and protection from any form of reprisal is critical for it to effectively fulfill its broad mandate, particularly in addressing sensitive human rights issues that directly impact SDG progress and ensuring that the voluntary SDG

⁸⁰ See footnote 59.

⁸¹ GANHRI, *Global Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders and Civic Space*. <https://ganhri.org/global-action-plan-on-hrds-and-civic-space>

review processes are complemented by robust human rights accountability.

C. Enhancing Data-Driven, Disaggregated Monitoring and Accountability

1. Prioritise and invest in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of high-quality, timely, and reliable disaggregated data across all SDG indicators, particularly by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, and disability, to ensure the "leave no one behind" principle is effectively monitored.
2. The pervasive data gaps, especially in disaggregated data, are a major impediment to identifying and addressing the specific needs of the most vulnerable populations. The "leave no one behind" principle necessitates identifying and reaching the furthest behind. Without granular data, policies and programs cannot be effectively tailored, and accountability for reaching vulnerable groups is severely hampered. This implies that the data gap is not merely a technical challenge but a fundamental human rights accountability gap. By focusing on this, Pakistan can ensure that its policies are evidence-based, targeted, and truly inclusive, allowing for effective tracking of human rights outcomes within the SDG framework and demonstrating genuine commitment to its human rights obligations.
3. Systematically link national SDG reporting and follow-up processes, including Voluntary National Reviews, with reporting to international human rights mechanisms (e.g., Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review), to reduce reporting burdens and accelerate progress under both agendas.
4. The strong links between human rights and sustainable development offer significant potential for "joined-up reporting and monitoring" to boost efficiency and accountability. Currently, these systems often operate in silos. By formally integrating these reporting streams, Pakistan can leverage existing human rights data and recommendations from international mechanisms to strengthen its SDG reviews, avoid duplication of effort, and enhance the credibility of its progress reports. This integrated approach will reinforce Pakistan's commitment to both human rights and the 2030 Agenda, ensuring a more coherent and impactful national strategy.

D. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation

1. Promote and institutionalise meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, local communities, and vulnerable groups in all stages of SDG planning, implementation, and review processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their contributions valued.
2. Participation is a core principle of the Human Rights-Based Approach 5 and is essential for effective SDG implementation, building policy coherence and bringing diverse perspectives. NCHR itself plays a key bridging role between government and civil society. By ensuring broad and meaningful stakeholder engagement, Pakistan can develop more relevant and effective strategies that are truly responsive to the needs and priorities of its population, particularly those at risk of being left behind, thereby enhancing the legitimacy, ownership, and ultimate impact of its SDG efforts.
3. Intensify climate diplomacy efforts to secure increased global financing and technological support, particularly for adaptation and addressing loss and damage, recognising Pakistan's disproportionate vulnerability to climate change and its human rights implications.
4. Pakistan is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which has severe human rights implications for its population, including displacement, health impacts, and threats to livelihoods. While national initiatives are in place, the scale of the challenge and the significant funding gap of \$348 billion by 2030 for its National Climate Finance Strategy necessitate substantial international support.⁸² This recommendation links climate action directly to human rights protection and calls for global solidarity, recognising that climate change is a shared responsibility with differentiated impacts, requiring concerted international cooperation to protect the rights of the most affected populations.

⁸² Profit Pakistan Today, *Pakistan requires \$348 billion to tackle escalating climate crisis by 2030*, March 9, 2025. <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2025/03/09/pakistan-requires-348-billion-to-tackle-escalating-climate-crisis-by-2030>

Annex A: Alignment of HRC Resolution 52/14 Questions with Pakistan's SDG Efforts and NCHR's Role

HRC Resolution 52/14 Call for Input Question	SDG(s)	Pakistan's Key Initiatives/Policies/Programs	NCHR Pakistan's Contributions	Key Challenges Identified
Q.a) Delivering on the commitment to leave no one behind by designing development plans, programs and policies aligned with human rights norms and standards including the principles of quality, affordability, accessibility, as well as equality, non-discrimination, and participation.	SDG 1, 3, 4, 8, 10	Social protection schemes (BISP, PPAF, PBM); Inclusive education for PWDs; Job quotas for PWDs; Laws protecting minority rights; Restoration of religious sites Quota systems for employment and inclusion of minorities & women	Following Reports on minority rights; '-Unequal Citizens'. - Situation report on Jaranwala Incident, - Ahmadiyya Situation, - Minority Rights and initiatives -The Issue of Bonded Labour in Pakistan -Alternate Report on Pakistan's compliance with CERD	Stark disparities in maternal mortality, out-of-school children, clean water access; Implementation gaps in reaching furthest behind
Q.b) Action taken to eradicate poverty and tackle root causes of gender and other inequalities by integrating human rights approaches and	SDG 1, 5, 10	Legal reforms (Protection of Women Act, Anti-Rape Ordinance, MFLO); Gender protection units; Women empowerment policies, Awareness campaigns; Increased	Reports on; - Criminalising Domestic Violence - Foreign Women Prisoners -Plight of Afghan Refugees -NCHR Submission on ICCPR	Persistent gender gaps (e.g., political empowerment); High incidence of violence against women; Religious extremism

recommendations from UN and regional human rights mechanisms in the analysis and SDG implementation strategies.		women's representation in councils Boards etc ; UN Women programs (vocational training, legal awareness)		
Q.c) Efforts to integrate human rights obligations into budgets and other aspects of fiscal policy to tackle inequalities and use maximum available resources for health, education, social protection and other human rights.	SDG 1, 3, 4, 10	National Assembly Resolution adopting SDGs; Mainstreaming goals into Five-Year Plan and provincial strategies	Advocacy for rights-based budgeting; Highlighting resource gaps in reports	Need for substantial "SDG Push" (additional 16.1% of GDP); Insufficient fiscal allocation to human rights sectors
Q.d) Efforts to integrate the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and related human rights in the endeavours to implement the 2030 Agenda. This could include examples of participatory climate action	SDG 6, 13	'Clean and Green Pakistan', 'Ten Billion Tree Tsunami', 'Protected Areas Initiative', 'Recharge Pakistan'; 'Living Indus' initiative; Strengthened EPAs, environmental courts	Monitoring environmental impacts on human rights. Reports; -When It Rains: The 2022 Floods & Challenges for Vulnerable Communities in Sindh -Haunting Footprint of Drought, Hunger & Poor governance	Ranked 5th on Global Climate Risk Index; Disproportionate climate impacts (floods, heatwaves); Water stress (116%); Fossil fuel dependency

that empowers traditional stewards of the environment such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities.			-Rights of Indigenous Kalash People -Report on Ethnic Hazaras	
Q.e) Advances in the realisation of SDG 16 through strengthening respect for human rights, effective rule of law, good governance, protection of civic space and human rights defenders, and independence of institutions at all levels.	SDG 16	Legal reforms to criminal justice system; Digitalisation of case management (CAMS); Alternative dispute resolution; Legal aid programs; NCHR A-status accreditation Legal Reform Package	Reports on; - Torture at Adiala Jail; -The Unending Saga of Enforced Disappearances -NCHR Investigation into Blasphemy Cases; -National conference on SDG 16	Low Rule of Law Index ranking (129th); Delayed trials, prison overcrowding; Enforced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings;
Q.f) Advances in the realisation of SDG 17, including good practices and key lessons learned on the collection and use of data (including disaggregated data) and integration of human rights considerations into efforts tackling debt sustainability.	SDG 17	Establishment of federal/provincial SDG units; Parliamentary Task forces; Development of national SDGs index; Collaborations with stakeholders	Advocacy for disaggregated data (e.g., for PWDs); Participation in VNR processes; Submissions to UN mechanisms	Significant gaps in disaggregated data (gender, disability, migration); Lack of comparable monitoring methodologies

Annex B: NCHR Pakistan's Thematic Reports (2022-2025) and SDG Linkages

Report Title	Publication Date	Primary Human Rights Issues Addressed	Directly Relevant SDG(s)	Significance
NCHR Submission on CRC 2025	April 2025	Children's Rights	SDG 4, 16	NCHR's engagement with international human rights mechanisms concerning children's rights.
Prison Data Report. Pakistan's Prison Landscape: Trends, Data, and Developments in 2024	January 2025	Prison conditions, rights of detainees	SDG 16	Overview of Pakistan's prison system, trends, data, and developments.
Long Standing Humanitarian Crisis in Kurram District	January 2025	Humanitarian issues, displacement	SDG 1, 10, 16	Addresses persistent humanitarian crisis in Kurram District.
NCHR Investigation into Blasphemy Cases	October 2024	Freedom of religion, fair trial, due process	SDG 16	Details NCHR's investigation into blasphemy cases.
NCHR Submission on ICCPR	October 2024	Civil and Political Rights	SDG 16	NCHR's submission concerning the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Report on Pakistan's Compliance with CERD	July 2024	Racial discrimination, minority rights	SDG 10, 16	Assesses Pakistan's adherence to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
Risks of sanitation work in Pakistan	July 2024	Labor rights, health, dignity	SDG 8, 3	Highlights dangers and risks associated with sanitation work.
Gap Analysis – Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act, 2022	June 2024	Torture, custodial deaths, accountability	SDG 16	Analysis of gaps within the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act.
Perilous Journeys: Unravelling Irregular Migration from Pakistan	May 2024	Rights of migrants, human trafficking	SDG 10, 16, 17	Explores complexities and dangers of irregular migration from Pakistan.
Protecting the Rights of the Foreign Nationals Imprisoned in Pakistan	May 2024	Rights of foreign detainees	SDG 16	Addresses rights and protection of foreign nationals incarcerated in Pakistan.
Situation Analysis of Child Labor in Punjab	April 2024	Child labor, education, protection	SDG 8, 4, 16	Analysis of the child labour situation in the Punjab region.
Ahmadiyya Report	April 2024	Minority rights, religious freedom, discrimination	SDG 10, 16	Focuses on issues related to the Ahmadiyya community.

When It Rains: The 2022 Floods & Challenges for Vulnerable Communities in Sindh	December 2023	Climate change impacts, disaster response, rights of vulnerable communities	SDG 13, 1, 10	Examines impact of 2022 floods and challenges for vulnerable communities in Sindh.
Upholding Inclusivity: Minority Rights Initiatives 2022-2023	September 2023	Minority rights, inclusivity, non-discrimination	SDG 10, 16	Highlights initiatives to uphold rights and inclusivity of minorities.
The Issue of Bonded Labour in Pakistan	August 2023	Forced labor, human trafficking, economic rights	SDG 8, 16	Addresses the problem of bonded labor in Pakistan.
Domestic Violence Policy Brief	March 2023	Gender-based violence, women's rights	SDG 5, 16	Outlines policy recommendations concerning domestic violence.
Malpractice in Mental Health in Pakistan: A Call for Regulation	August 2022	Right to health, mental health services	SDG 3	Highlights malpractices in the mental health sector and advocates for regulation.
Unequal Citizens: Ending Systemic Discrimination against Minorities	May 2022	Systemic discrimination, minority rights	SDG 10, 16	Addresses systemic discrimination faced by minorities and calls for its cessation.



National Commission for Human Rights

5th Floor Evacuee Trust Complex,
Agha Khan Road, Islamabad

051 9216771

www.nchr.gov.pk