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# Pakistan

SHETRADES OUTLOOK | 2024



SheTrades





TIMEFRAME

March  
2018

March  
2025

**OBJECTIVE**

To increase economic growth and job creation in Commonwealth countries by enabling the increased participation of women-owned businesses in international trade. The project is funded by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and implemented by ITC under the framework of the SheTrades Initiative.

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**ACTIVITIES**

- Provide governments with the tools, information and capacity to implement gender-responsive policies. Also offer a platform for governments to work collectively and share best practices, including through SheTrades Outlook and in-country technical assistance on policy reform.
- Provide direct support to women-owned businesses. Build their competitiveness and their capacity to participate in trade through intensive training, mentoring and coaching.
- Work with business support organizations to improve the service offering for women entrepreneurs.
- Engage private sector partners to adopt business practices that create economic opportunities for women-owned businesses.



SHETRADES OUTLOOK

# SheTrades Outlook: Creating Trade Opportunities for Women in Pakistan

This policy brief presents analysis and recommendations for Pakistan to unlock women's participation in trade by improving its policy ecosystem. It is based on the results of the SheTrades Outlook tool in Pakistan, which collected and analysed data from 19 national institutions and six private sector organizations.



## WHY DOES **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT** MATTER?

In 2022, women made up 50% of the population in Pakistan. However, women's level of participation in the Pakistani workforce has been consistently low. It reached the highest proportion in over 30 years in 2022 at 25%. Pakistan is yet to unlock women's full economic potential to boost the country's economic growth. This highlights the need to provide tailored support to women and mainstream gender in government policies.

In the longer term, Pakistan aspires to become one of the largest economies in the world – among the top 10 by 2047. To achieve this goal, Pakistan launched [Pakistan Vision 2025](#), which focuses on seven priority pillars: People First, Growth, Governance, Security, Entrepreneurship, Knowledge Economy and Connectivity. Pakistan Vision 2025 addresses gender inequality by including actions on protecting women's rights, discouraging gender discriminatory cultural practices, increasing women's participation in decision-making, and providing protection and day care benefits at work. There is also a strong focus on ensuring access to education and boosting women's entrepreneurship. This will enable women to contribute to production and help transform Pakistan into an inclusive and prosperous economy.

SheTrades Outlook can provide critical data to track progress towards achieving the goals of Pakistan Vision 2025. It can also help policymakers identify areas of improvement to promote women's economic empowerment and help Pakistan become one of the world's biggest economies. SheTrades Outlook offers practical insights to ensure that policies affecting business and trade are gender-responsive.

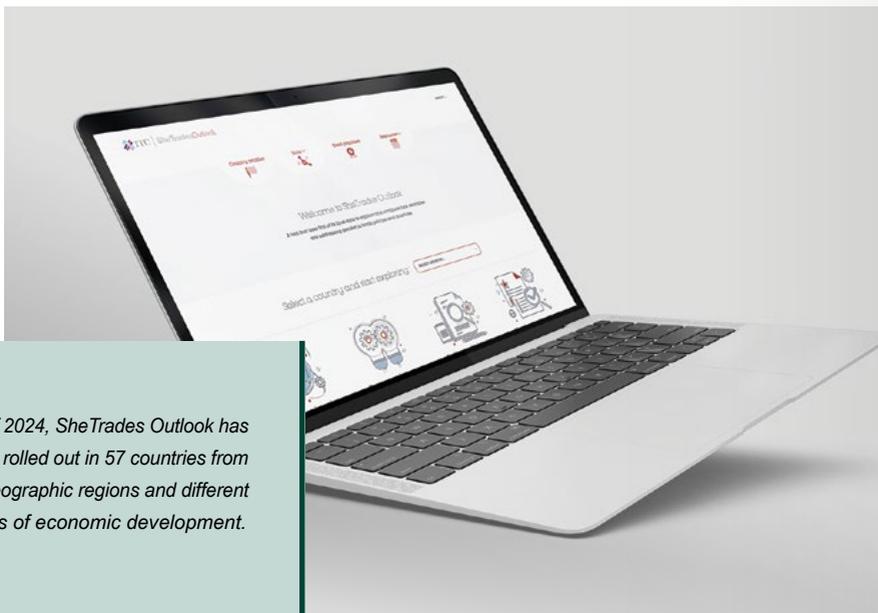
## WHAT IS SHETRADES OUTLOOK?

SheTrades Outlook is an innovative, evidence-based policy tool designed by the International Trade Centre (ITC). It identifies policies, laws or programmes that contribute to or prevent women's participation in the economy and trade. This first-of-its-kind tool is based on 55 indicators. These are grouped under six interlinked pillars – Trade Policy, Business Environment, Legal and Regulatory Framework, Access to Skills, Access to Finance and Work and Society.

SheTrades Outlook is based on data collected by national consultants from an average of 20 national institutions and organizations per country. Data is collected through interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires. Examples of institutions surveyed include ministries of trade, education, finance, technology and women's affairs; public procurement authorities; Customs authorities; central banks; national statistics offices; business associations; chambers of commerce and industry (CCIs); and other trade support institutions.

SheTrades Outlook also makes use of reliable, publicly available and recently updated databases from the Inter-Parliamentary Union; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Statistics Division; the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. Additionally, an average of three good practices are identified per country by national experts.

As of 2024, SheTrades Outlook has been rolled out in 57 countries from all geographic regions and different levels of economic development.



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## RESULTS

# SheTrades Outlook – results

Twenty-five organizations – 19 national institutions and six private sector organizations – were interviewed to collect data. Institutions were chosen based on their strategic objectives and relevance in relation to the six pillars of the initiative. The institutional survey was conducted between January and May 2023. This policy brief presents the latest available data.

The SheTrades Outlook indicator scores range from zero to one. Pakistan performed the highest in Access to Skills. This was followed by Legal and Regulatory Framework, Access to Finance and Business Environment. Pakistan performed the lowest in Trade Policy and Work and Society.

Detailed information on the scores under each pillar is presented below. This includes strengths and bottlenecks, as well as gaps identified in the data.



# TRADE POLICY



<b>Consultation process</b>	
Initiatives or mechanisms are in place to include women's associations/organizations in consultation processes	
Women's associations/organizations participate in consultation processes	
<b>Trade and gender-related concerns are included in policies and agreements</b>	
Policy or action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment includes trade-related concerns	
Trade agreements or regional economic integration agreements include gender provisions	
<b>Assessment, monitoring and evaluation</b>	
Ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of trade agreements are carried out	
Trade policy uses gender indicators	
<b>Gender-disaggregated data</b>	
Law or regulation mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated data	
Gender-disaggregated data is collected on companies	
<b>Women's participation in strategic roles</b>	
Women are represented in ministerial and parliamentary positions	
<b>Capacity building on gender issues</b>	
Trade Ministry staff receive training on gender issues	
A gender focal point focusing on trade and gender issues has been established	



The Trade Policy pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of trade policies, agreements and practices. It also includes the adoption of gender-sensitive practices in trade and trade-related institutions.

Pakistan exhibits medium-low performance in this pillar. This is mainly attributed to:

- The inclusion of women in consultations on trade policy
- Using gender indicators in projects and programmes
- Provision of training for staff of the Ministry of Commerce and Textile (MoCT) on gender issues
- The existence of a trade and gender focal point
- Having a formal definition of a women-led or women-owned business.

However, there are opportunities for improvements such as mainstreaming gender in trade agreements, having a national gender policy, undertaking gender impact assessments of trade agreements, and mandating the collection of gender-disaggregated data.

## WHAT WORKS?

MoCT includes women in policymaking; however, gender-disaggregated data on participants in consultations is not collected. MoCT hosts several extensive consultations with women Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs) and women business associations to formulate dedicated chapters on gender in its policies.

The [Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2020–25](#) has a separate chapter on gender mainstreaming in policymaking and economic activities, which came about as a result of consultations with women business associations and women-owned businesses. Under the policy, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) created women entrepreneur facilitation desks that focus on:

- Facilitating women's participation in international trade fairs
- Organizing awareness campaigns and skills development programmes for women entrepreneurs
- Providing women entrepreneurs with business support services such as information about the registration process for setting up a business, business development plans, business feasibility studies, intellectual property rights and registering patents
- Facilitating access to finance for women entrepreneurs
- Facilitating the development of special incentives for companies with a high number of registered women workers as well as skills development initiatives with the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission

- (f) Formation of a consultative group under the National e-Commerce Council to ensure gender mainstreaming into e-commerce policy.

MoCT also organizes regular training sessions on gender issues for its own staff.

The [Finance Act 2021](#) provides a definition of a women-owned enterprise: ‘start-up established, owned or after first day of July 2021 as a sole proprietorship concern owned by a woman or an Association of Person all of whose members are women or a company whose 100% shareholding is held or owned by women’. However, several institutions have not adopted this definition in their operations.

There is an opportunity for Pakistan to align the definition above with the internationally recognized definitions of a women-led and/or women-owned business as prescribed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) [International Workshop Agreement 34: Women's entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria](#).<sup>1,2</sup> Capacity building for institutions should be undertaken to help them adopt the standard definition in their operations. This can be complemented with awareness-raising workshops on the importance of using a standard definition to improve the targeting and delivery of activities aimed at improving women's participation in business and trade.

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1. Women-owned business – business that is more than 50% owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women.

2. Women-led business – business that is at least 25% owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, which has at least one third of the board of directors comprised of women, where a board exists, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women.

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## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Pakistan has an opportunity to introduce a national strategy on gender equality that includes trade concerns. At the provincial level, there is an [Implementation Framework for Punjab Women Development Policy 2019](#). It addresses concerns related to women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship but does not include targets for specific concerns in trade.

In SheTrades Outlook, trade agreements can receive three ratings: ‘limited’, ‘evolving’ or ‘advanced’ levels of gender responsiveness. Pakistan is party to 36 free trade agreements. However, none have an evolving or advanced level of gender responsiveness. Going forward, the government can consider incorporating gender equality issues in trade agreements. This is important to ensure that trade agreements create equitable opportunities for men and women and contribute to inclusive growth and the development of a country. Both developed and developing countries are increasingly including provisions on gender equality in trade agreements. The ITC policy guide, [Mainstreaming Gender in Free Trade Agreements](#), presents recommendations and model clauses to improve women's participation in trade through trade agreements.

To improve monitoring and evaluation of existing trade policies, it is crucial to collect gender-disaggregated data; for instance, on companies engaged in international trade. In this regard, the government may wish to establish a law to mandate the collection of gender-disaggregated data across all agencies and departments.

Gender impact assessments may also be carried out before and after signing a trade agreement. This is important to understand the impacts of the trade agreement on women in member countries. Gender impact assessments can also ensure that the positive impacts of trade agreements for women are being maximized, while minimizing the negative impacts.



## LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK



<b>Signing, ratification and enforcement of key international conventions</b>	
Country has ratified the CEDAW and CEDAW optional protocol	
Country has ratified and enforced ILO Conventions 100, 111, and 183	
<b>Gender-responsive budgeting approach</b>	
Government uses gender-responsive budgeting approach	
<b>Laws that facilitate access to productive resources</b>	
Law provides women and men with equal rights to property and access to financial services	
<b>Laws that facilitate access to the labour market</b>	
Law mandates non-discrimination in employment based on gender, protection from sexual harassment and equal remuneration for work of equal value	
<b>Paid parental leave policies</b>	
Maternity leave benefit is mandated	
Paternity leave benefit is mandated	
<b>Childcare and education support and facilities</b>	
Parents receive childcare and education support	



This pillar assesses a country's adoption of laws and regulations that protect and promote women's rights. It also covers laws and policies that encourage women's entry into, and continuity and advancement in, labour markets. An example would be laws that support women to combine work with childcare responsibilities. More than 50% of the data for this pillar was sourced from World Bank

Women, Business and the Law; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Information System on International Labour Standards.

Pakistan has a medium-high performance in this pillar. This is linked to the establishment of national laws that provide men and women with equal rights to inheritance and ownership. There is also a law against sexual harassment in the workplace. The government has adopted a gender-responsive budgeting approach and provides parental leave and childcare benefits.

### WHAT WORKS?

Internationally, Pakistan has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by ratifying the ILO Conventions 100 (equal remuneration) and 111 (non-discrimination in employment and occupation).

Domestically, the government has legislated to ensure women and men have equal inheritance and ownership rights. Pakistan also has laws on non-discrimination in employment based on gender, and protection against sexual harassment in the workplace.

The government has also applied a gender-responsive approach to planning and budgeting since 2005 under the [Gender-Responsive Budgeting Initiative](#). The purpose of the initiative is to re-prioritize government revenue spending by taking into account the needs of men and women and analysing the different impacts of public expenditure and revenue policy on men and women. The government is scaling up adoption of the gender-responsive budgeting approach.

Pakistan provides fathers with 10 days of paternity leave with full pay. The government also provides childcare and education support for parents. Free education is provided in public schools, including free textbooks, school bags and notebooks for children between ages 5 and 16 years. The Benevolent Fund provides a stipend for the education of children from Grade 9 onwards. There are also day care centres in the country, such as at the Directorate of Women Development Sindh.

## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Pakistan has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); however, it holds reservations against Article 29. It can consider ratifying the CEDAW Optional Protocol and ILO Convention 183 (maternity protection).

In addition, the government can establish laws to prohibit gender-based discrimination in access to credit and in opening a bank account. This can help ensure that women can access various financial instruments to support the growth of their businesses and their participation in trade. There is also an opportunity for Pakistan to establish laws that provide equal remuneration to men and women for work of equal value.

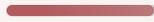
Currently, women receive 12 weeks of maternity leave with full pay. There is an opportunity to ensure that women are provided with 14 weeks of maternity leave based on ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection.



# BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT



## Representation of women business associations



Women's business associations are represented at the national level



Women-led businesses participate in activities conducted by chambers of commerce



## Business start-ups



Support services are available when establishing a company



National institutions implement incubator/accelerator programmes



## Access to trade and customs information



Help and information desks are available at government offices to assist companies in complying with national regulations and export/import requirements



Information on changes in customs procedures and trade regulations are announced in a timely manner



## Public procurement



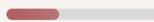
Information on public procurement process, vendors and transactions are available



Preferential scheme on public procurement for women-led businesses is implemented



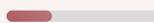
## Reporting and monitoring unfair practices in trade



Means exist for women and men to report complaints on wrongdoing on trade regulations or procedures



## Trade facilitation and gender-responsive framework in customs



Single-window electronic interface is available



Gender-sensitive guidelines by the World Customs Organization or other national monitoring framework is implemented



Border-level customs agents and officials receive training on gender-sensitive practices



A conducive business ecosystem is essential to achieve resilient growth through the business cycle. This pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of the business ecosystem and covers industry bodies that support women's entrepreneurship. It also includes the ease and costs of establishing and running a business, trading across borders, and accessing information and public procurement markets.

Pakistan has a medium-high score in this pillar. This is related to the existence of women's business associations in the country; the availability of business support services, incubators and accelerator programmes; and establishment of help and information desks. Information on public tenders and changes in Customs procedures and trade regulations is also published in a timely manner. However, opportunities for improvement exist, such as adopting a preferential scheme for women-led businesses in public procurement; establishment of a single window interface; and providing a grievance mechanism to report complaints on malpractices in trade.

## WHAT WORKS?

There are several women's business associations in Pakistan, such as Women CCIs in Lahore, Bahawalpur and Quetta; and the Dera Ghazi Khan Women CCI. Women-led businesses also participate in activities held by the Federation of Pakistan CCIs. Generally, women participants make up 95% of the total participants in activities organized by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

Business support services are available when establishing a company in Pakistan. For instance, the [Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority \(SMEDA\)](#) offers trainings, awareness sessions, seminars, help desks, walk-in facilitations and grants. Between January and December 2022, SMEDA supported approximately 2,050 women entrepreneurs. TDAP also has dedicated desks for women entrepreneurs in 16 regional and subregional offices to provide support services. Several CCIs – such as the Federation of Pakistan CCIs, the Lahore CCI and the Women CCI Lahore – also provide business support services such as step-by-step guidelines, information desks, online information, and counselling to entrepreneurs.

Incubator programmes are also available for start-ups. This includes the National Incubation Centre, which is a flagship project of the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication. It provides incubation services to technology-based start-ups and is present in various cities across Pakistan. There is also Plan9, which is an initiative of the Punjab Information Technology Board that provides incubation services to early-stage start-ups in Pakistan. The Lahore University of Management Sciences [Centre for Entrepreneurship](#) offers an accelerator programme and other support services for start-ups in Pakistan. Other accelerators present in the country that target women entrepreneurs include:

- Accelerator Programme for Women Entrepreneurs
- SEED Ventures
- Women Business Incubation Centre
- WeRaise
- CaterpillHERs
- WeCreate.



26 women entrepreneurs have benefited from SEED Ventures. For women specifically, there is also the [Women Resource Centre and Incubators](#), which is a partnership between the Women CCI Lahore and the Punjab Small Industries Corporation.

Various institutions provide help desks to assist traders in complying with export and import requirements. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) provides help and information on several import/export procedures. Physical information desks are available at each regional office/collectorate. Information is also available virtually, on the [FBR official website](#). SMEDA also has help desks that provide guidance on import/export procedures. Updated information on Customs procedures and trade regulations is visible at airports. Customs clearance-related information can also be found [online](#) on the FBR website.

The Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) regularly provides online information about the application and selection process for public tenders through the [public procurement portal](#). The PPRA also manages a [database of registered suppliers](#) that is gender-disaggregated. In total, 4,906 suppliers are registered in this system. This can help map women's participation in government procurement. Work is also under way to transform the manual procurement system to an electronic one. Vendors also receive capacity building to enable them to register themselves in the system, which is a prerequisite to participate in public procurement.

## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

The government may consider establishing a grievance mechanism that allows traders to report complaints on malpractices in trade. Gender-disaggregated data should also be collected on persons reporting trade malpractices. This can help assess the needs of women and track how government initiatives benefit women entrepreneurs.

The government can promote women's participation in public procurement through inclusive policy and practices, and preferential schemes. Adopting gender-responsive public procurement can ensure that women and men are on an equal footing to submit bids, win tenders and supply to the government. Targeted measures include reservations for women-led businesses in procurement opportunities, targets on the share of public procurement opportunities awarded to women-led businesses, and including women-owned businesses in the subcontracting plans of awarded public procurement. The ITC policy guide, [Making Public Procurement Work for Women](#), presents steps to reshape public procurement to improve women's participation in it.

Pakistan has partially implemented a [single window electronic interface](#). Government agencies are currently being integrated into it. The Pakistani single window electronic interface allows electronic transactions including:

- Submission of Customs declarations and sea/air cargo manifests
- Application for and issuance of import and export permits, preferential certificates of origin, and sanitary and phytosanitary certificates
- Payment of Customs duties and fees
- Application for Customs refunds
- Exchange of Customs declaration / certificates of origin / sanitary and phytosanitary certificates between Pakistan and other countries.

Once fully implemented, the single window electronic interface will help further streamline and facilitate trade processes.

Pakistan Customs may also consider implementing the [World Customs Organization Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool](#) and World Customs Organization Customs Integrity Action Plan in its work. It can also provide training on gender issues to Customs officials. This can help eliminate the gender-based discrimination and harassment typically faced by women in trade.



## ACCESS TO SKILLS



### Education and literacy



Law mandates compulsory education



Gender disaggregated data on adult literacy



### Skills programmes for workers and entrepreneurs



Enrolment rate in technical and vocational programmes (female/male ratio)



Skills training programmes for workers are conducted



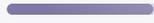
Business skills training for MSME owners are conducted



Training to facilitate access to markets are conducted



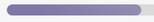
### Targeted support and capacity building programmes for women



National institutions provide targeted support and capacity building programmes for women



### Access to ICT and business innovation support



Policies and programmes are in place to support women's business innovation



Access to internet



Improved access to education is essential to build necessary skills and reduce inequality of opportunities between men and women. It is also vital to break the vicious cycle of poverty. This pillar focuses on measures designed to enhance women's abilities and business-related skills. One objective is to close the education gap. Another is to equip women with the capacity to compete and succeed in international markets and occupations traditionally dominated by men.

Pakistan performed the highest in this pillar. This is related to the availability of skills upgrading programmes for workers and entrepreneurs, and training on trade procedures and regulations. Targeted support and capacity-building programmes for women are available and there are initiatives in place that support business innovation for women. Gender-disaggregated statistics on internet and mobile phone usage are also collected.

### WHAT WORKS?

Pakistan has several skills upgrading programmes for workers. The Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF) offers in-person trainings on topics such as agriculture and livestock, financial services, hospitality and retail services, telecoms and information and communications technology, and textile manufacturing, among others. A total of 24,430 females made up 61.4% of all beneficiaries of these trainings. As part of the National Business Development Programme, the SMEDA launched the On-Premises Training Programme initiative and conducted 87 programmes benefiting 1,700 workers. The TDAP provides training on:

- How to start a business
- Financing and funding
- Legal and taxation processes
- Registration with CCIs
- Export procedures
- Product development
- Marketing and branding
- Export readiness.

Some 1,366 men and women have benefited from these trainings.

The PSDF and the SMEDA also provide business skills training to support entrepreneurs. The PSDF offers courses on entrepreneurship in professions such as beautician, home appliance repair and video production, among others. The SMEDA has also launched a Youth Entrepreneurship Programme which provides training sessions at universities for students. Themes covered include accounting and budgeting, management, planning and growing a business, marketing and branding, and e-commerce.

Training is available to help entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) navigate trade and public procurement rules and procedures. Training is conducted on import/export documentation, the single window (Web-Based One Customs system) and logistics management. The TDAP holds trainings for national exporters in Quetta and on the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement Phase II in Gilgit. The TDAP also implements the National Exporters Training Programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and new exporters. It aims to provide detailed knowledge of export processes, export documentation, export financing and export marketing. PPRA also organized 14 workshops for state-owned entities on public procurement rules and the electronic procurement system in 2022. They were attended by 123 participants, of whom six were women.

The PSDF and the SMEDA work with women CCIs and women's organizations in the country to provide targeted information and technical assistance. The FBR, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan also conduct capacity-building seminars for women CCIs in the country.

Policies and programmes are in place to support women's business innovation. For instance, the TDAP has conducted multiple e-commerce trainings for women entrepreneurs, including some in collaboration with Facebook. The TDAP also organized two trainings for the Dera Ghazi Khan Women CCI and the Bahawalpur Women CCI on using Amazon. The National Science and Technology Park and Special Technology Zones Authority provide support for technology-based innovation and entrepreneurship in Pakistan through Business Incubation Centres. These foster an entrepreneurial spirit at universities by providing guidance, access to laboratories and information and communication technology facilities, generating start-up opportunities for students, and transferring knowledge from incubators to universities.

The national statistical survey collects gender-disaggregated data on mobile phone and internet usage. In 2019–2020, it was reported that 43% of women used the internet at least once a day, compared with 47% of men. In the same year, a bigger gender gap was observed in mobile phone ownership between men and women in Pakistan. Some 65% of men owned a mobile phone in Pakistan, compared with only 25% of women.

## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

National institutions can consider improving the enrolment of women in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. In 2018, the female enrolment rate was only 33%.

Gender-disaggregated data can be collected on participants in trainings on trade and public procurement rules and procedures, and business skills trainings for MSMEs.



## ACCESS TO FINANCE



### Access to financial services



Digital financial services are available



There is access to formal financial resources (female/male ratio)



### Financial inclusion strategies and programmes



Financial inclusion strategy or programme is implemented



### Financial support for women-led businesses and women's business associations



Women-led businesses receive financial support to participate in trade fairs



### Fiscal and trade finance schemes



Financial institutions are mandated to report gender-disaggregated data



Fiscal schemes are available to facilitate entrepreneurial opportunities



Trade finance schemes are available in the country to facilitate trade



### Financial instruments and other financing opportunities



Financial instruments are available to support entrepreneurial opportunities



Venture capital financing opportunities are available to support women entrepreneurs



This pillar focuses on women's access to formal financial services. It also covers whether governments – alone or in partnership with the private sector – have developed innovative solutions to promote financial inclusion for women. Examples include removing or modifying bank requirements for physical collateral or verifiable cash flow so that women can access finance more easily.

Pakistan has a medium–high performance in this pillar. This is related to several factors. These include the adoption of national financial literacy programmes, availability of financial instruments to facilitate trade and entrepreneurship, provision of financial support to women-led businesses to participate in trade fairs, and the availability of a variety of digital financial services in the country, among others.

### WHAT WORKS?

Digital financial services are available in Pakistan to facilitate entrepreneurship and trade. These include mobile and online banking, international wire transfers, issuing payments and peer-to-peer lending.

The SBP has launched the [National Financial Literacy Program \(NFPL-II\)](#), which allocates targets to all banks. For instance, the HBL Microfinance Bank was given a target to conduct financial literacy sessions with 9,500 beneficiaries in 33 districts in 5 years. The FINCA Microfinance Bank conducts financial literacy sessions in the country. In total it has conducted 250 financial literacy sessions with 4,200 participants, of whom 65% were women. The themes covered under the financial literacy sessions are budgeting, savings, investing, debt management, financial products and services, rights and responsibilities, and branchless banking.

Financial institutions are mandated by the SBP to report gender-disaggregated data. This helps develop financial inclusion strategies to encourage more women to access formal financial services.

Various trade finance schemes are offered by financial institutions that support women in international trade. The export sector is seen as a priority sector for credit. The SBP provides refinancing at 0% to participating financial institutions for onward lending to women entrepreneurs across the country.

The HBL Microfinance Bank and the FINCA Microfinance Bank offer microloans and special rates. The HBL Microfinance Bank has also launched specialized products, such as loans for women entrepreneurs on softer terms. There is also a grant scheme in the country called [Karandaaz](#). It promotes access to finance for MSMEs, helps develop pilot investment models and identify new investment avenues, and promotes financial inclusion through digital solutions.

Lastly, the TDAP sponsors businesses to participate in international trade fairs. It ensures that 10% of the participants are women-led businesses and new exporters. Women-led businesses also receive subsidies for their participation in trade fairs (50% of airfare and a US\$100 per day allowance as well as a 50% discount on the stall). The SMEDA's Women Entrepreneurship Development Cell also sponsors women entrepreneurs to participate in various women trade fairs across the country. Sponsorship includes stall fees and travel costs for women entrepreneurs travelling from a different city.

#### WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Pakistan adopted a [National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2015–2020](#), which aimed to increase the percentage of women who have access to formal financial services to 50% by 2020. There is no data available on the impact of the Strategy. SBP has now adopted the [Banking on Equality Policy](#), which aims to reduce the gender gap in financial inclusion by bringing a shift towards women-friendly business practices in the financial sector. All financial institutions are mandated to have a comprehensive gender mainstreaming policy in place to reduce the gender gap. There is an opportunity for Pakistan to mainstream these goals in a new and broader national financial inclusion strategy.

The government can also consider providing venture capital financing opportunities to start-ups, including those that are women-led.



## WORK AND SOCIETY

### Woman's opportunities in the labour market

Women are allowed to work in the same industries and perform the same tasks as men

Estimated annual earned income, US\$ PPP (female-male ratio)

Labour force participation rate (female-male ratio)

Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)

### Time spent on unpaid work

Time-use on unpaid domestic chores and care work (male-female ratio)



This pillar addresses the unconscious or conscious gender biases that prevent women from participating equally in the economy. This includes existing patterns of job segregation and the interventions set up by governments to address these biases. Pakistan scored the lowest in this pillar.

### WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

There is an opportunity for Pakistan to facilitate the participation of women in managerial positions. In 2021, women occupied only 5.7% of managerial positions.

With no law on equal remuneration of women and men for work of equal value, the gender wage gap persists in Pakistan. In 2021, the female-to-male gender wage gap ratio in Pakistan was 0.53. Pakistan can also establish policies that enable women to work in the same industries as men.

Lastly, Pakistan can consider conducting regular time-use surveys to understand the difference between how women and men allocate their time on unpaid care and domestic work.



# The way forward

Pakistan Vision 2025 sets out a goal for the country to become one of the largest global economies by focusing on inclusive growth. This can only be achieved by ensuring that both women and men can participate in the economy. Based on the SheTrades Outlook results in Pakistan, there are several areas where Pakistan has made progress in promoting women's economic empowerment, such as access to skills, access to finance, and the legal and regulatory framework. However, more can be done to make the business and trade environment more inclusive.

In line with the goals of the gender mainstreaming chapter of the Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2020–25, results from SheTrades Outlook indicate that progress has been made on providing skills development programmes and support services for women entrepreneurs. Pakistan has also been facilitating women's participation in international trade fairs. However, there is scope for greater progress by establishing more targeted initiatives that facilitate women entrepreneurs' access to finance (including through the provision of financial instruments targeted at women). Special incentives can also be offered to encourage women to participate in skills training workshops as well as in national TVET programmes.

Policymakers can mainstream gender in trade agreements, conduct ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of trade agreements, and use gender indicators in policies and programmes. Pakistan can also consider adopting gender-sensitive practices from the World Customs Organization and providing gender-sensitive trainings to Customs officials.

Women's participation in entrepreneurship and trade can play a key role in transforming Pakistan into one of the largest global economies. The following recommendations can ensure that women become a large contributor to Pakistan's economic growth through trade.



## 01

### THE WAY FORWARD: MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO TRADE POLICY

Pakistan has an opportunity to use trade policy as an instrument to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Specifically, the government can:

- Incorporate gender equality issues in trade agreements
- Conduct gender impact assessments before and after signing trade agreements
- Align the formal definition of a women-owned SME to the internationally recognized definition of a women-owned business specified in ISO International Workshop Agreement 34: Women's entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria
- Conduct awareness-raising activities among national institutions on the standard definition on women's entrepreneurship and mandate the use of the definition in projects, programmes and other initiatives on women's economic empowerment
- Provide training on gender issues to Customs officials.

## 02

### THE WAY FORWARD: INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORKS

It is important to ensure that policies, schemes and practices related to business and trade benefit both women and men. To do this, the government can:

- Adopt a national gender policy that includes trade concerns
- Update the national financial inclusion strategy and ensure that it includes specific actions to improve women's access to finance
- Adopt a preferential public procurement scheme for women-led businesses
- Establish a mechanism for reporting complaints on malpractices in trade regulations
- Fully implement the single window electronic interface to facilitate trade.



**GOOD PRACTICE:  
WOMEN INSPIRATIONAL NETWORK (WIN) PROGRAMME**

The Financial Inclusion Strategy and the Women Financial Service department of Mobilink Microfinance Bank (MMBL) launched their flagship Women Inspirational Network (WIN) programme in 2021. Its objective is to empower women within the organization and nationwide to be able to access finance.

The programme provides women with opportunities to open digital bank accounts and access subsidized financial products and health insurance plans. It also provides capacity-building and upskilling trainings. The programme facilitates the setting up of e-commerce shops owned by women. Additionally, the WIN programme actively engages with government intermediaries and state regulators as part of policy dialogues and government-led initiatives for women’s empowerment.

During the financial year 2022, women’s bank account ownership at MMBL increased by 78%. The number of women borrowers grew by over 14% and financing to women entrepreneurs increased by 43%. Over 1,000 women were trained and certified.

Source: [Mobilink Microfinance Bank](https://www.mobilink.com.pk/).

**03 THE WAY FORWARD: MONITORING MECHANISMS**

To support the monitoring and evaluation of existing gender-responsive initiatives, the government can:

- Mandate the collection of gender-disaggregated data across all government agencies and departments
- Collect gender-disaggregated national statistics on time use
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on:
  - exporting firms
  - participants of business skills training programmes and market access trainings.

**04 THE WAY FORWARD: TARGETED INITIATIVES**

Initiatives targeted to women are crucial to ensure that they benefit from access to skills and finance initiatives. Specifically, national institutions can:

- Provide venture capital financing opportunities specifically to women-led start-ups.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

More information about this policy brief and the SheTrades Outlook project can be found at: [www.shetrades.com/outlook](https://www.shetrades.com/outlook).

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**Contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:**



# #SheTrades

FOR EVERY WOMAN, EVERYWHERE

The International Trade Centre's (ITC) SheTrades Initiative is a global platform that empowers women to engage in business, creating value for both them and their communities. The Initiative ensures that the right capacities and conditions are present to foster inclusive and sustainable trade.

SheTrades delivers activities and training that improve women traders' ability to do business successfully. At the same time, the Initiative works to remove inequalities that hinder women's participation in trade and foster a better trade environment for all.



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