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POLICY BRIEF

Gender Diversity in Senior and High-Paying Roles

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POLICY BRIEF:
GENDER DIVERSITY IN SENIOR AND HIGH-PAYING ROLES

ABSTRACT

The gender gap in Pakistan in high paying and managerial jobs is persistent and severe. Despite having higher ratio of females in higher education, they still end up disproportionately lower in higher administrative and managerial jobs. The findings of the Labor Force Survey 2024-2025 highlight the lower proportion of females, 6.1% only serving as managers with lower salary packages averaging 85,056 per month in comparison to their male counterparts earning 105,778 per month and with a higher unemployment rate of 10.5% as compared to males having 6% only. This policy brief examines the structural, institutional, and socioeconomic factors contributing towards the gap in statistics between males and females employed at higher managerial positions. It also recommends evidence-based policy changes that could significantly increase the proportion of females employed at higher paying jobs.

1. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Pakistan's labor force has grown significantly over the past four years. Employment level increased from 67.3 million in 2020-2021 to 79.7 million in 2024-2025, indicating increase in workforce by 3.1 million workers on average each year. The percentage of women participating in the labor force increased from 21.4% to 24.4%, during the same period of time. However, unadulterated participation statistics conceal a much more alarming reality: where women work, how much they make, and who they report, all of which point to a gendered labor market at every level of seniority.

The most authenticated and representative Labor Force Survey has highlighted the extent of the difference in number employed of males and females at higher paying jobs. As per the definition of 19th ICLS, only 77.2 million people are employed, but only 17.8 million of them are women. Approximately 49.7% of women work as unpaid household workers, and 58.2% of them are employed in low-paying agricultural and forestry jobs. This indicates that less than 1 in 12 working women are employed in professional and high paying industries.

The regulatory body, Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) took an important step towards female inclusion at higher paying jobs by introducing the new Act 2017, in which it was made mandatory to have at least one women director on board in all the listed companies of Pakistan. However, as per the statistics of the Labor Force Survey 2024-2025, it can be concluded that the corporate board mandate is not enough when the structural, institutional and social economic factors are not letting females to approach towards higher paying jobs. There is a need of detail policy framework to address this gap in a meaningful way.

2. CURRENT STATE OF EMPLOYMENT

2.1 Labor Force Participation: Persistent Gender Asymmetry

There is still a significant gender disparity in labor force participation. Male LFPR is 68.7% under the 19th ICLS framework, whereas female LFPR is 22.7%. The absolute difference of almost 46 percentage points has hardly decreased, even if both have improved between surveys. Females who look for professional or high paying jobs faces greater obstacles as evidence by the higher female unemployment rate of 10.5% as compared to males of only 6%.

Indicator	Male	Female	Gap
Labor Force Participation Rate (19th ICLS)	68.7%	22.7%	46.0 pp
Unemployment Rate (19th ICLS)	6.0%	10.5%	4.5 pp
Employment-to-Population Ratio	Higher	Lower	Significant
Share as Contributing Family Workers	~Low	49.7%	—

Table 1: Key Gender-Disaggregated Labor Market Indicators, LFS 2024-25

2.2 Occupational Segregation: The 'Sticky Floor' and 'Glass Ceiling'

Occupational data show a standard pattern of gendered labor market stratification: women are systematically excluded from the top of the job hierarchy and concentrated at its base. The distribution of female workers under the 13th ICLS definitions is as follows:

Occupational Group	Overall (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Managers	2.2	2.8	0.6
Professionals	5.9	4.4	10.3
Technicians & Associate Professionals	4.3	4.8	2.6
Clerical Support Workers	1.7	2.1	0.5
Service and Sales Workers	16.7	21.0	3.2
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery Workers	30.2	21.2	58.2
Craft & Related Trades Workers	13.2	13.3	12.9
Plant / Machine Operators & Assemblers	8.1	10.5	0.5
Elementary Occupations	17.7	19.9	11.2

Table 2: Distribution of Employed Population by Major Occupational Groups and Sex, LFS 2024-25 (13th ICLS)

The fact that women make up 10.3% of professionals—a rather encouraging percentage—but only 0.6% of managing roles is a startling discovery. The category professionals consist of nursing, teaching, and social work professions, which are usually female dominated professions. This represents that female are more based i and care sectors rather than working as managers or at top management positions. The vertical segregation, a structural barrier that prevents educated females from reaching top positions and contributing towards the gender disparity.

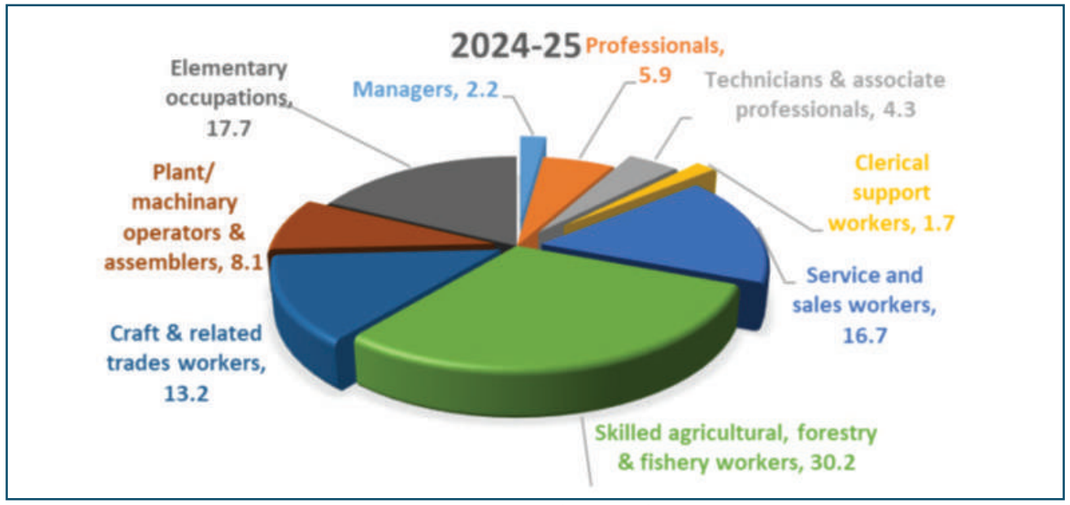

Figure 1: Employed Persons: Major Occupational Groups (13th ICLS)

2.3 The Managerial Representation Gap

The data on female representation in management and higher paying jobs are presented by the Labor Force Survey 2024-2025 based on the internationally benchmark standards, offering disaggregated provincial and area-level insights:

Province / Area	Women as % of All Managers	Women in Senior & Mid Mgmt (%)
Pakistan (All Areas)	6.1%	9.6%
Pakistan – Rural	9.2%	14.3%
Pakistan – Urban	4.4%	6.8%
Punjab (All Areas)	7.0%	10.7%
Sindh (All Areas)	3.5%	5.4%
KP (All Areas)	9.2%	14.8%
Balochistan (All Areas)	3.3%	6.3%

Table 3: SDG Indicator 5.5.2 – Proportion of Women in Managerial Positions, LFS 2024-25

2.4 The Gender Wage Gap

Gender labor market segmentation is extended by wage inequality. The table below shows that the overall average salary of male is 39,302 PKR while female mean wage is PKR 37,347. This represents a mean gender pay discrepancy of almost 5%. At the managerial level, the disparity grows significantly:

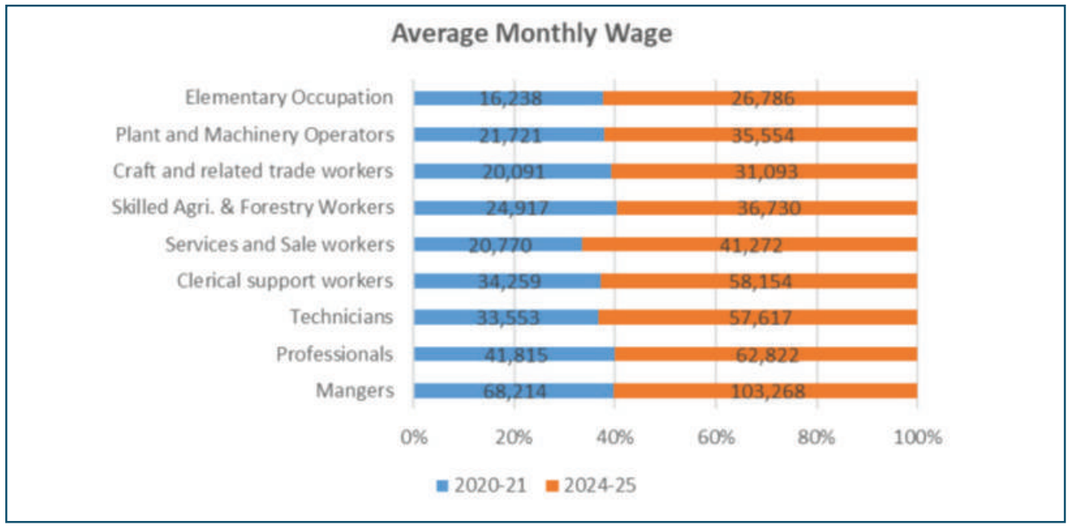

Figure 2: Average Monthly Wage by Major Occupational Groups

Notably, in cases where females attain management position, they earn PKR 20,722 less per month than their male counterpart, a difference of about 20%. The salary gap at professional level is 29%, which highlights towards discriminating salary setting policies and cannot be justified with the lack of education at this level. Although the total pay gap has decreased from 18.4% in 2020–2021 to 5.0% in 2024–2025, it is concerning that there are still significant unjustified inequalities at senior occupational categories.

2.5 Structural Barriers: Unpaid Care Work and Workforce Exclusion

The asymmetric burden of unpaid household and care labor is a distinguishing structural barrier. According to the statistics shared by the LFS 2024-2025, 66.7 million women, or 77.1% of all women aged 10 and older, are among the 117.4 million people who perform unpaid domestic work nationwide. Particularly:

- 45.4 million women work in the home, doing tasks including cooking, cleaning, sewing, and pressing.
- There are 32.1 million women working with livestock.
- Twenty million women work as unpaid caregivers.

The highly educated females are discouraged to even approach management positions due to the unshared burden of domestic work and childcare responsibilities. They are further excluded from higher paying job by strict 9–5 schedules, inadequate childcare facilities, a lack of paid parental leave, and a lack of workplace harassment policies. Women had a slightly higher formal sector participation rate (33.7%) than males (27.0%) in the formal sector, where protections are more likely to exist. This suggests that women choose formal work when it is available and the problem of accessibility is limited.

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A multifaceted policy agenda is suggested by the evidence. The LFS 2024–2025 data and successful worldwide precedents serve as the foundation for the following six recommendations

Recommendation 1:
Strengthen Requirements for Mandatory Gender Representation

Although it only tackles the highest level of corporate governance, the SECP 2017 mandate requiring at least one female director on listed business boards was a historic step. Annual public disclosure requirements, staggered compliance timetables, and a minimum of 30% female representation in senior and middle management roles in all organizations with 100 or more employees should be included in the regulation. International benchmark of SDG 5.5.2 should be used to set and track sectoral and provincial goals previously gathered by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

Recommendation 2:
Require Pay Equity Audits

New laws should be enforced by government requiring yearly pay equity audits for companies with 50 or more employees, given the ongoing compensation disparities of 20% at managerial levels and 29% in professional occupations. The results and findings related to tax incentives and procurement eligibility should be submitted to the Ministry of Human Rights. The LFS wage tracking methodology ought to be formalized as a yearly monitoring tool

Recommendation 3:
Establish Subsidized, Accessible Childcare Facilities

Unpaid child care is one of the main reasons for females not working in the corporate sector. The government should initiate Pakistan's National Daycare Policy, in which employer-provided or publicly subsidized childcare facilities for businesses with 50 or more employees, should be made accessible for its female employees. This is especially important in urban industrial and commercial centers where the gender gap in management is highest (4.4% female managers in urban areas).

Recommendation 4:
Introduce Flexible Work Legislation

Pakistan should implement flexible working rights legislation that would allow all employees, regardless of gender, to request flexible or hybrid working arrangements, with companies required to provide written justification for any refusal. This would be based on the Government of Qatar's model of offering two hours of flexibility to female employees each day. This method, is broadly acceptable as it has overcome the structural barrier without making female participation stagnant in the economy.

Recommendation 5:
Strengthen Workplace Anti-Harassment Enforcement

Inconsistent application of the Workplace Act of 2010 Protection Against Harassment of Women still contributing towards harassment issues. The government should increase funding for Federal Ombudsperson offices, create a specific Workplace Harassment Enforcement Unit within the National Commission on the Status of Women, and mandate that all formal-sector businesses submit yearly reports on harassment complaint rates, timeliness of resolutions, and policy compliance.

Recommendation 6:
Invest in Female Leadership Pipeline Programs

As per the statistics of the Labor Force Survey, 10.3% of female employees are already professionals, although just 0.6% of these positions result in managerial postings. Public- private partnerships should be used to fund targeted mentorship, sponsorship & leadership development programs at the provincial level, giving attention to industries where women are already prevalent (public administration, health, education, and financial services).

4. CONCLUSION

Pakistan is standing at a very crucial point in its history. According to the LFS 2024–2025, earnings are increasing, female labor force participation is expanding, and the formal sector is gradually becoming more inclusive. However, the rate of change at the senior professional and managerial level is completely insufficient. The structural glass ceiling is well established, with women occupying only 6.1% of managing jobs and making almost 20% less than male managers.

There is a huge quantifiable cost involved of not taking appropriate actions, including lost economic productivity, lower household incomes, and a waste of Pakistan's expanding pool of talented educated women. The labor market continues to systematically undervalue and exclude women from its upper tiers, with 10.5% of women in the labor force unemployed—much higher than the male rate—and nearly half of employed women classed as unpaid family contributors.

Extending representation mandates, enforcing wage parity, investing in care infrastructure, enacting flexible work laws, bolstering harassment safeguards, and creating the leadership pipeline are just a few of the ideas in this brief that make up an integrated, evidence-based agenda. Every measure is advantageous on its own. When taken as a whole, they stand for the structural change needed to achieve gender-inclusive growth and realize Pakistan's full economic potential.

The information is at hand. The tools for policy are documented. To put evidence into practice, institutional dedication and political will are necessary.

KEYWORDS

Gender inequality, wage gap, leadership gap, labor market reform, Pakistan, LFS 2024-25, inclusive growth, glass ceiling, managerial representation

USE OF AI TOOLS

Claude (Anthropic) was used to support [initial drafting of sections, descriptive data analysis, generation of visualizations – specify as applicable]. Prompts were designed by myself, and all outputs were critically reviewed, edited for accuracy, and integrated with my own analysis. No raw AI output appears in this document without verification.