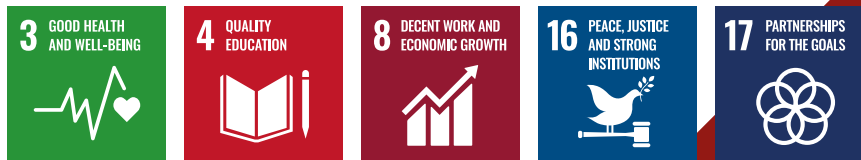


solidar



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN

MONITOR 2021



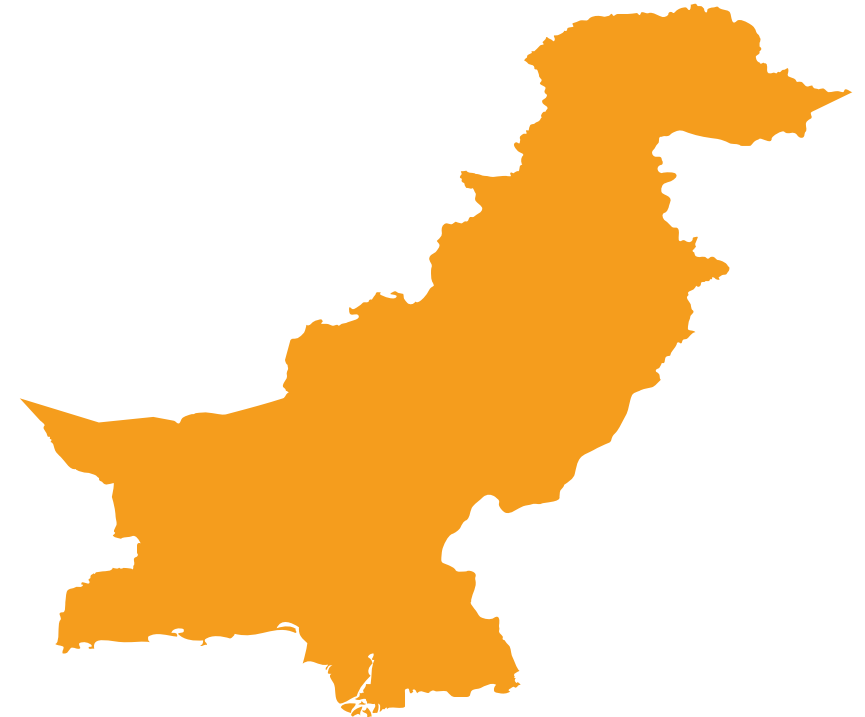
SUMMARY

How can the European Union (EU) better contribute to building an **enabling environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** in Pakistan? How can the EU support the progressive **realization of Economic and Social Rights - that is to say, Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise, Decent Work and the Right to Social Protection for all** - in connection with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the EU Action Plan on Democracy and Human Rights in the country? Developed by Solidar Suisse Hong Kong and by the Labour Education Foundation in Pakistan, the following report identifies challenges and opportunities for the EU to boost its actions for the progressive realisation of Economic and Social Rights in the country and to enhance its partnership with Civil Society Organisations.



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1. ABOUT THE SOLIDAR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS MONITOR

In 2015, all United Nations member states signed up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a global commitment to transform our current model of economic development into one based on respect for human rights and the environment. In 2017 - with the aim of promoting policy coherence for development - the new European Consensus on Development announced the alignment of the development policies and operations of the European Union (EU) and its member states with the 2030 Agenda.

According to SOLIDAR, the 2030 Agenda constitutes a powerful framework to:

- a) Promote a model of sustainable development at the service of the greatest number and not of the few, making the full realization of human and environmental rights its main objective.
- b) Ensure the progressive realization of economic and social rights, namely decent work, social protection, and freedom of association.

The Economic and Social Rights Monitoring Report (ESRM) is a tool developed by SOLIDAR members and partners within the framework of the EU-funded program “Organizing International Solidarity” (OIS).¹

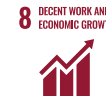
The objective of the ESRM is to engage in a structured dialogue with the EU, by collecting the views and recommendations of civil society organizations (CSOs) on the contribution of national and European policies and programs to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and especially of:



SDG 3: Good health and Wellbeing



SDG 4: Quality Education



SDG 8: Decent Work and economic growth



SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals

¹ A presentation of the OIS programme is available at: <https://prezi.com/view/9zuxuivoqUSD3w1pGJSz>

2. PAKISTAN - COUNTRY BACKGROUND AND EU DEVELOPMENT'S PRIORITIES

TABLE 1. PAKISTAN AT A GLANCE

Population ²	220.829.331 (2020)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ³	263.687 billion (2020)
Human Development rank ⁴	154 over 189 countries
Total public spending on social protection, excluding health (percentage of GDP) ⁵	1.9 of GDP (2020)
Sustainable Development Score (current) ⁶	57.7/100 (129 over 165 countries)

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POPTOTL?locations=PK>

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=PK>

⁴ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAK>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--dgreports/--dcomm/--publ/documents/publication/wcms_817572.pdf

⁶ <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/pakistan>

2.1 EU - PAKISTAN relations: an overview

With one of the major development cooperation programs in Asia, Pakistan is a major European Union's (EU) development cooperation partner. The current EU-Pakistan development cooperation priorities are 1) rural development; 2) education and vocational training; 3) good governance, rule of law and human rights.

The EU and Pakistan are important political partners. The Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan represents the EU on a range of issues including development cooperation, trade, humanitarian assistance, security and counter terrorism, energy, environment, health, transport, migration, and climate change.

When it comes to trade relations, the EU supports Pakistan's integration into the global economy. The EU is by far the biggest export destination for Pakistani products - about 1/3rd of its exports reaches the EU market. Pakistan's exports to the EU grew by more than 64% since the granting of the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status in 2014.

Being a GSP+ beneficiary, Pakistan is required to respect and implement the 27 international conventions in the areas of human



rights, good governance, labour rights and environmental protection⁷. The EU continuously monitors the implementation of these conventions with the involvements of CSOs and, every two years, issues a report on progress made by the country in this direction.⁸

This monitoring mechanism, together with the EU human rights dialogues and other consultations led by the EU, offers a space for CSOs to share their concerns and proposals.

⁷ Relevant GSP+ conventions: https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2013/december/tradoc_152024.pdf

⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/1327/pakistan-and-eu_en

3. BUILDING AN ENABLING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOs) AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDs)



“An independent civil society, enabling civic space and the support and protection of human rights defenders are essential elements to achieve these priorities [the EU Action Plan’s Priorities]”⁹

Pakistan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2008¹⁰. However, the country still shows occurrences of violations of the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. This constitutes significant human rights violations, which are protected by such instruments.

3.1 Legal and regulatory framework for CSOs

The right to organize is guaranteed by Pakistan’s 1973 constitution. Indeed, Article 17 guarantees the right to organize subject to any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the sovereignty of the country. Furthermore, there are several laws that regulate the registration process of civil society organizations such as “The Societies Registration Act 1860”, “The Trust Act 1882”, “Voluntary

Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance (Registration and Control) 1960”, “Companies Ordinance 1984”, and “Trade Organizations Ordinance 2007”.

The **environment for civil society organizations has always been complicated with a hectic registrations process and surveillance by the state**. More recently **the government**, with the intention of fulfilling the requirements of the “Financial Action Task Force”, **has shrunk the space left to civil society organizations**. The federal government introduced the “NGO Policy” in 2013¹¹ and successively all the provincial governments passed the “Charities Act”, which required all the NGOs getting foreign funding, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Economic Affairs Department (EAD) and register under the “Charities Act”. These regulations force NGOs to provide several documents such as the registration certificates; the constitution; annual action plan and five years strategic plan; detailed annual budget; tax registration certificates; tax exemption certificates; tax returns of the last three years; evidence of withholding taxes; annual performance reports for three years, and other documents.¹² In the wake of the “Charities Act”, **thousands of NGOs were deregistered by the government and their accounts were frozen. Many people who had no idea that their organization was deregistered were also arrested for ‘illegally’ executing their**

⁹ EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 – Council Conclusions – EU Action Plan <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46838/st12848-en20.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/09/pakistan-commits-major-human-rights-treaties#:~:text=In%20a%20major%20move%20to%20advance%20human%20rights%2C,other%20Cruel%2C%20Inhuman%20or%20Degrading%20Treatment%20or%20Punishment.>

¹¹ http://www.ead.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/iii_%20NGOs%20Policy%202013.pdf

¹² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593118>

work. Over 65% of NGOs were deregistered in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2020 and their banks were frozen.¹³

CASES OF VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The last few years have seen a surge in the violations of freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Many prominent journalists like Matiullah Jan¹⁴ were forcefully disappeared and kept in disappearance for days, while some have not even returned yet.

A journalist, Asad Ali Toor,¹⁵ was beaten by some people at his house. Similarly, Gulalai Ismail¹⁶, another prominent civil society activist and journalist had to flee from the country due to constant threats from security agencies.

The past few months have also seen a rampant crackdown on the peaceful protests in the country. Students who were peacefully protesting the medical licensing test were violently beaten by the police¹⁷. The police also sprayed toxic chemical on the protestors to scatter the protest. Similarly, chemical spray was also used against protesting government employees in the capital city of Islamabad¹⁸.

When it comes to freedom of association, laws such as the “Anti-Terrorism Act” and “Cyber Crime Act”, originally promulgated to counter terrorism, are being used against human rights defenders to curb any kind of dissent.

Pakistan is signatory of several international conventions regarding the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs), including the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” (ICCPR) and the “Convention Against Torture” (CAT). However, several are the **threats used against HRDs in Pakistan.**

Enforced disappearances are one of the biggest threats that is used against HRDs in the country. Journalists and other HRDs are forcefully disappeared, and their example is used as a deterrent to stop other HRDs from doing their work. That is the case of Ahmed Norani, a prominent investigative journalist who was stabbed by masked men while he was investigating the business of a powerful retired general.¹⁹ Similarly, laws like the Cyber Crime Act are used against HRDs. In one such instance, Shafiq Ahmed a lawyer and HRD was abducted and after his release, he was charged under this act.²⁰ In addition, many other HRDs are threatened that if they write something against military or government they will be charged under this act. Moreover, **threats of murder, abduction and road accidents are also used to intimidate HRDs in Pakistan.**

Pakistan is in the midst of a difficult era in terms of human rights violations. Since 2018, the country has been governed by what critics term a “**hybrid regime**” that brings together a civilian set-up under the tutelage of the country’s powerful military. The regime was established after the July 2018 elections, which were widely reported as rigged, and the results were dismissed by the opposition parties. The new regime, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, has indulged in various rights violations including **the muzzling of media, use of sedition laws against dissidents, continuing the policy**

13 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *State of Human Rights in 2020, ‘Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Freedom of Association’* pp 89

14 <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistani-journalist-matiullah-jan-found-after-brief-suspected-abduction/a-54253769#:~:text=Matiullah%20Jan%20went%20missing%20on,men%20scuffling%20outside%20the%20school.&text=%22The%20doors%20of%20his%20car,inside%2C%22%20she%20told%20DW.>

15 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/26/pakistani-journalist-assaulted-in-latest-press-freedom-attack>

16 <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/10/02/765677629/afraid-for-her-life-a-pakistani-activist-vanishes-and-escapes-to-new-york>

17 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/884242-police-baton-charge-medical-students>

18 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1606684>

19 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1366598>

20 <https://protect-lawyers.org/en/item/shafiq-ahmed-3/>

of enforced disappearances and attacking critical thought in academic institutions.

The accelerating authoritarianism of the regime is matched by an increasing narrative against human rights defenders and dissidents across the country. The current government has popularized the notion of an alleged “fifth generation war” against Pakistan, in which, it claims, the **real danger to the sovereignty of the country is “fifth columnists” within the country involved in propaganda against the government.** This implies that all those who uphold the sanctity of the Constitution and the fundamental rights to speech, assembly and dissent are viewed as enemy agents, and are prevented from engaging as part of the legitimate political community.

3.2 Capacity-development opportunities for CSOs

Currently, funding for COSs is channelled mainly to service delivery and government institutions. Therefore, organizations working for human and labour rights remain greatly underfunded. One reason for such a change is the NGO Policy which bars local and international NGOs from working in Pakistan until they sign a MOU with the Economic Affairs Department. In addition to the MOU, they need intelligence clearance from the security institutions. This process takes a very long time, and the government has a weak structure to hasten the process of registration, which makes many local organizations desist from applying. Furthermore, the current government has tightened the grip on international NGOs and local NGOs. In 2018, it banned 18 international organizations alleging that they were working on promoting the ‘enemy’s agenda’.²¹ Threats like these compelled many international organizations to divert their funds towards government institutes.

²¹ <https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-the-pakistani-government-cracking-down-on-ngos/a-56537755>

²² Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Friedrich Naumann Foundation. *Women Legislators` Political Participation in Pakistan 2018-20, 2020.*

Similarly, there are not enough training opportunities for the local NGOs. There has been a considerable decrease in such opportunities because trainings are mostly done by the rights-based organizations which are not getting adequate funds.

One major capacity development area identified by the Labour Education Foundation (LEF) is advocacy on economic rights with focus on the participation of discriminated population’s group to the economic and political life of the country.

Moreover, there is also a need of capacity development in the government sector. The bureaucracy needs to be trained in engaging with the people and addressing their problems. It should especially be trained in engaging with the CSOs. Instead of considering them their opponents, they should consider CSOs as their allies in policymaking.

Also, the meaningful participation in policymaking and public consultation remains limited. Owing to the policies of the current government regarding civil society, in the recent years the involvement of CSOs in the policy making has decreased even further. Except for a few organizations, **most of the participation by CSOs falls within relief work and service delivery and only a few organizations are involved in the policy making.** Among the organizations considered, there are the “Human Rights Commission of Pakistan” and “Friedrich Naumann Foundation”, which published a report on the participation of women parliamentarians in legislation.²²

On a positive note, in 2018, a consultation concerning the **EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2018-2020**, took place. In that occasion, SOLIDAR’s partner LEF, along with several other civil society organizations, was invited to take part.





3.3 Recommendations

The EU and other partner countries should use the political influence over the Pakistani government to force it to **comply with its international agreements regarding human rights**. The EU, for instance, has a great influence since it is the biggest trade partner of Pakistan. Secondly, **EU Member States should address the human rights issues in Pakistan through bilateral dialogues with the country**. Lastly, the **civil society of the EU Member States should strengthen direct relations with the Pakistan's civil society**. In the last few years, many countries decided to exclude Pakistan from the list of preferred countries for humanitarian work. Furthermore, many organizations have stopped working in Pakistan due to fears of a government tightening on international NGOs.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



4. DECENT WORK FOR ALL

The government of Pakistan has ratified and put in force the 8 fundamental ILO conventions. This includes the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) (1957), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (No. 87) (1951), the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98) (1952), the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) (2001), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105) (1960), the Discrimination Convention (No. 111) (1961), the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) (2006) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) (2001)²³.

Nevertheless, occurrences of labour rights continue to take place in Pakistan. This includes cases of wage theft, forced labour, child labour, and job discrimination.

4.1. Wages

There is no job protection in many sectors in Pakistan. In many cases workers are fired without any notice. After the advent of Covid-19, hundreds of workers were fired without any prior notice. According to a report of the “Asia Floor Wage Alliance” concerning wage theft; factory owners in Pakistan denied workers more than \$85 million in wages, in 2020. The situation is similar for 2021.²⁴

²³ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103166

²⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1634024>



The government launched a social protection program called Ehsaas Program to cope with the health emergency, however, this program excludes the workers who have been registered as having jobs but have been left unemployed due to Covid. The mechanism used to set the eligibility criteria of the Ehsaas Program was very much focused in protecting vulnerable people and people living in extreme poverty. In addition, even though the minimum wage was increased in 2021 to twenty thousand rupees per month, it is significantly lower considering the growing inflation and household expenditures. Many workplaces in formal and informal sectors continue to pay less than the minimum wage. Furthermore, most of the workers do not have any social security coverage which is a serious problem considering the low wages and the rise of inflation levels.

4.2 Forced labour

The constitution of Pakistan prohibits all forms of forced labour. Moreover, the “Bonded Labor Abolition Act, 1992” in Punjab, Baluchistan, Islamabad, and the “Bonded Labour Act, 2015” in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prohibit any kind of forced labour in the country. However, the practice of forced labour continues with almost 3 million people still entrapped in bonded labour.²⁵ Many of them are entrapped at home and are obliged to pay the debt they have contracted with their landlords.

Bonded labour in Pakistan remains a serious problem. The laws and policies to abolish this practice are not implemented due to the influence of powerful landlords on police and state institutions. The implementation of laws is the primary problem which should be addressed in order to abolish the practice of forced labour in farms, households, brick kilns and other industries.

²⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/life-of-slavery-the-perpetuation-of-bonded-labor-in-pakistan/a-51792298>

²⁶ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_780964.pdf

²⁷ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, “State of Human Rights 2020”, Child Labour, pp 36

Finally, COVID-19 has had a severe, often devastating, impact on Pakistani migrant workers. It sparked large-scale layoffs, causing the return and repatriation of vast numbers of migrants from destination countries.²⁶ Many migrant workers have fallen into the trap of debt bondage after having contracted debts with recruitment agencies that helped them to find a job abroad.

4.3 Child labour



Millions of children in Pakistan are trapped in child labour. Among them, most work in households, brick kilns and agriculture. The provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh have no law that criminalizes child labour. In this regard, the bribery and corruption of the Pakistani Labour Department is a major issue and must be eradicated to make any child labour policy effective.

WORSE FORM OF CHILD LABOUR

In June 2020, Zohra Shah, an eight-year-old maid in a household of Rawalpindi was beaten to death for releasing her employer’s birds.²⁷ The case caused uproar on social media after which the government moved towards making an amendment into the “Employment of Children Act, 1991”. The amendment declared child labour as a “hazardous line of work”. However, it is only applicable in the capital. Punjab also banned child labour under the “Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019”, but it prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15 only.

4.4 Job discrimination

Gender based job discrimination is a big challenge in Pakistan. Women face many obstacles, especially in the workplace. According to the law, the employer has to provide a three-month paid leave during pregnancy and childbirth. However, most of the factories do not comply with it. Human Rights Watch in 2019 interviewed 10 factory workers regarding the maternity leave. The workers said that there is no compliance with the maternity leave law in the factories. One of the interviewed said that “there is no maternity leave. Whenever a woman worker becomes pregnant, she leaves the job herself to avoid the indignity of being fired.”²⁸

Furthermore, there are no day care centres at factories which make it difficult for women to juggle between their household and work. Many women are obliged to take their children in factories because no one at the home is available to take care of them.

Finally, the laws against sexual harassment are not effectively implemented in the workplaces. Pakistan is a signatory of the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” and ratified the ILO Convention no. 111, “Discrimination Convention, 1958”. In addition, the constitution of Pakistan also guarantees equal opportunities without any gender discrimination. However, the problem lies at the end of implementation of the laws. For example, several provinces of Pakistan passed strict laws against workplace harassment, but the implementation of these laws remains questionable.

²⁸ https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/01/24/no-room-bargain/unfair-and-abusive-labor-practices-pakistan#_ftn118

²⁹ Labour Education Foundation, Newsletter, Vol 191, August 2021, pp 16

³⁰ <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/12099.pdf>

ACCESS TO SCHOOL: A SUCCESSFUL ACTION BY WORKERS

“Workers Welfare Fund Punjab” is an independent organization that works with the help of workers’ funds. It provides educational grants, death grants, and marriage grants to the children of workers. In addition to that, it also provides pick up and drop services for schools to the children of workers.

In August 2021, the Secretary Labour of Punjab stopped the free transport that was used for the pick-up and drop of the children of workers from their schools. As a response to that, the Labour Quomi Movement, an organization fighting for labour rights, staged a protest in front of workers’ welfare school in Faisalabad. They blocked one of the main roads of the city, along with the children and their parents. They were pressurized to call off the protests. Nevertheless, the next day protests were organized in other cities including the provincial capital Lahore. They did not call off the protest until the schedule of buses was posted on the noticeboards of the schools.²⁹

4.5 Recommendations

The EU’s Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP +) agreement may offer a real leverage to ensure that fundamental rights, including labour and minority rights, are respected. However, due to the weak implementation of labour laws in Pakistan, workers are not able to get their due rights from employers of the private sector. As highlighted in this report, there are still violations of minimum wages and freedom of association in many industries.³⁰



5. UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HEALTH AND EDUCATION

5.1 Access to Healthcare

One of the biggest challenges for a quality and universal healthcare in Pakistan is the access to hospitals. The number of hospitals, particularly in the far-flung areas, is very low. People must travel hundreds of kilometres to reach hospitals. Furthermore, **the inefficiency and corruption in public hospitals is another major challenge.** In many cases officials ask for bribes in order to admit patients.

This is the case of Hamza Mazhar, a 35-year-old teacher who took his mother to a hospital in Lahore, for the treatment of her upper respiratory tract infection. The hospital had an insufficient capacity to admit her to Intensive Care, for which the woman died.³¹ Due to the unavailability of staff and doctors, patients suffer, particularly those in need of immediate attention. This happened to Parveen Bibi, a resident of Kasur, who gave birth in the hospital toilet due to the unavailability of a gynaecologist.³²

The current government launched a program for universal health care called Sehat Sahulat Program. According to this program, people who meet the established criteria will be able to get up to 7-20 thousand rupees for their treatment. However, the program only covers a small part of the country.

³¹ https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/challenges-improving-health-care-pakistan?gclid=CjwKCAjvwuGJBhB1EiwACU1AiZxkipFilddZN6PD3hKPxtKW08waoPNxV-arlgSovDi6dRBOe8aP2RoCubkQAvD_BwE

³² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1607360>

³³ <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>

5.1.1 Recommendations from SOLIDAR network in Pakistan to the European Union

The EU and other international organizations should support and facilitate the government's program of Universal health, through technical expertise and aid. The program launched by the government is ambitious in terms of addressing the health care issues of deprived sections of society and it could be a good step forward. However, it should be expanded to other parts of the country.

Furthermore, the **EU should also help bringing transparency in the overall health sector.**

5.2. Access to Education

Article 25(a) of the constitution of Pakistan states that *"The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law."*

However, 22.8 million children are still out of school in Pakistan.³³

One of the biggest reasons is that governments have ignored the education sector. **The education budget continues to be lower as compared with other sectors.** As a result, **many communities in the peripheries do not have access to schools.** In the province of Balochistan, a child must travel an average of 30 kilometres to reach

a primary school, 260 kilometres to reach a middle school, and 360 kilometres to reach a high school³⁴. **Another reason for so many out-of-school children is poverty.** According to a recent survey by the World Bank³⁵, poverty rate in Pakistan is approximately 39.3%. Therefore, many people are forced to send their children to work instead of schools due to extreme poverty.

Recently, the government launched the Single National Curriculum (SNC), aiming at minimizing the gap between the education provided by public and private schools and bringing students studying in the religious seminaries into the mainstream. However, instead of improving the quality of education, many fear that it will further deteriorate the quality. Instead of bringing public schools to the level of private schools, the SNC aims to do the opposite, which can have a drastic impact on the education sector.

5.2.1 Recommendations

In order to improve the access to quality education in Pakistan, **the EU and other international organizations should promote awareness in communities and create a linkage between schools and communities.** Due to social stigma, many parents do not send their children to schools, particularly girls. In this scenario, it is fundamental to initiate awareness programs.

Similarly, the EU should support programs that promote **access to education, especially early childhood education, with the objective to prepare children for entering primary schools.**

³⁴ <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/07/04/out-of-school-children-in-balochistan/>

³⁵ https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/poverty-in-pakistan-rises-to-over-5-in-2020-estimates-world-bank-121062200084_1.html#:~:text=Using%20the%20lower%2Dmiddle%2Dincome,23%2C%20reported%20The%20News%20International



6. CASE STUDY

FIGHTING FOR DIGNITY: THE STORY OF SHAHIDA JOSEPH

“My name is Shahida Joseph. I am 35 years old. My residence is in Khaliq Nagar, an area of Lahore. I was educated up to primary standard level. I am living in a house for which I pay 7,000 rupees a month to rent. In my family only boys were treated well, and all opportunities were provided to them. This is the reason why my father had all focus on the education of my brothers and not us sisters.

I was married off to a daily wager when I was only 16 years old. My father always thought that we sisters were a burden on him. He wished to kick off this burden as soon as possible. Now I have 6 children, including three daughters. In my in-law’s house, gender discrimination is at its peak, and I was scolded upon the birth of each daughter.

The income of my husband is not sufficient to meet our daily needs. In this situation I started my job in a factory near my house. The shirts and hoods are prepared in this factory. Almost 1500 workers, including 700 women, work in this factory. I have been working in this field for the past 10 years. I work as a thread cutter and attach the hood cap in a department of this factory. My monthly salary was 13,000 rupees before the COVID-19 pandemic and now I am paid even less than this amount.

The legal minimum wage of formal workers in the year 2020 was 17,500 rupees per month, but the minimum wage law is not implemented properly, and most workers are not getting it. My wage of 13,000 rupees per month is an example of the non-implementation of this law. I am a



Supporters of Women Workers Helpline shout slogans against torture on women during a protest demonstration on November 29, 2010 in Lahore, Pakistan. Shutterstock.com

piece rate worker and most of the factories employ workers on contracts or at a piece rate.

I have no knowledge about unions as I am not educated about this. I started work like all other workers and we received no training about the laws. The factory management does not like workers who have some knowledge about their rights. **There is no union at the factory. Workers feel afraid of forming a union.**

I think that the minimum wage should be above 30,000 rupees a month for a worker so at least it can meet the expenses of her daily life in a respectful way. The factory and government should provide all free medical care, old age benefits and other social protections for a worker. I am worried about my future as I can't save anything. In old age I will not be able to work so my survival will be very difficult. In my opinion, if workers are protected by social security, then they can survive better in the future”.

Source: Interview with Shahida Joseph, September 2021

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report provided an overview of Pakistan's main implementation gaps in terms of economic and social rights. A lot remains to do to ensure the protection of HRDs and CSOs active for the defence of women and workers' rights, end child labour and end violence against women and religious minorities.

According to LEF, the two main priorities to be addressed in the country are:

- 1. Protecting women and religious minorities:** violence against women and religious minorities are dramatic realities in the country. Almost every day there is an episode of violence against women: many women are killed in the name of honour or sometimes for ridiculous reasons such as not cooking properly.³⁶ Also, religious minorities are particularly exposed to violence. Moreover, forced conversions is another big issue that minorities are facing in the country. Urgent measures are needed to ensure that no one is killed or suffers because of religion.
- 2. Stop the deterioration of labour rights after Covid-19:** the incidents of wage theft of hundreds of thousand dollars and layoffs during the lockdown have depicted the vulnerability of the working class in the country. Most of the workers do not have any social security. In addition, collective bargaining has been buried by many factory owners with the support of the state.

³⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401971>

Moreover, in the context of the implementation of the new EU Action Plan on Democracy and Human Rights, SOLIDAR calls the EU to:

- 1. Ensure transparent human rights monitoring and scrutiny by civil society:** Set up a transparent and participatory implementation monitoring system of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, in particular with regards to the progressive realisation of Economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs) and to ensure the statutory role of civil society in contributing to the EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies.
- 2. Setup ESCR observatories in close cooperation with EU delegations:** foster the creation of supervising initiatives (observatories) in close cooperation with EU delegations to monitor the implementation of the different chapters of the Action Plan – and in particular the chapters referring to ESCRs – in partnership with local civil society and social partners.
- 3. Ensure adequate funding:** The different chapters of the action plan should receive adequate and continued funding.
- 4. Regularly engage with civil society on the overall implementation of the action plan and organise dedicated annual consultations.**
- 5. Promote a zero-tolerance policy on child labour,** and the eradication of forced labour, including by supporting partnerships at all levels, labour rights in EU trade relations, the promotion of human rights due diligence in global supply chains and efforts to promote ratification of the ILO Forced Labour Protocol.
- 6. Strengthen the implementation of human rights provisions in EU trade policy and use the full potential of monitoring mechanisms ensuring meaningful participation of local CSOs.**

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Progressive Students Collective



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Organising International Solidarity (OIS)

A presentation of the OIS programme can be found at the following link:

<https://prezi.com/view/9zuxuivoqUSD3w1pGJSz/>