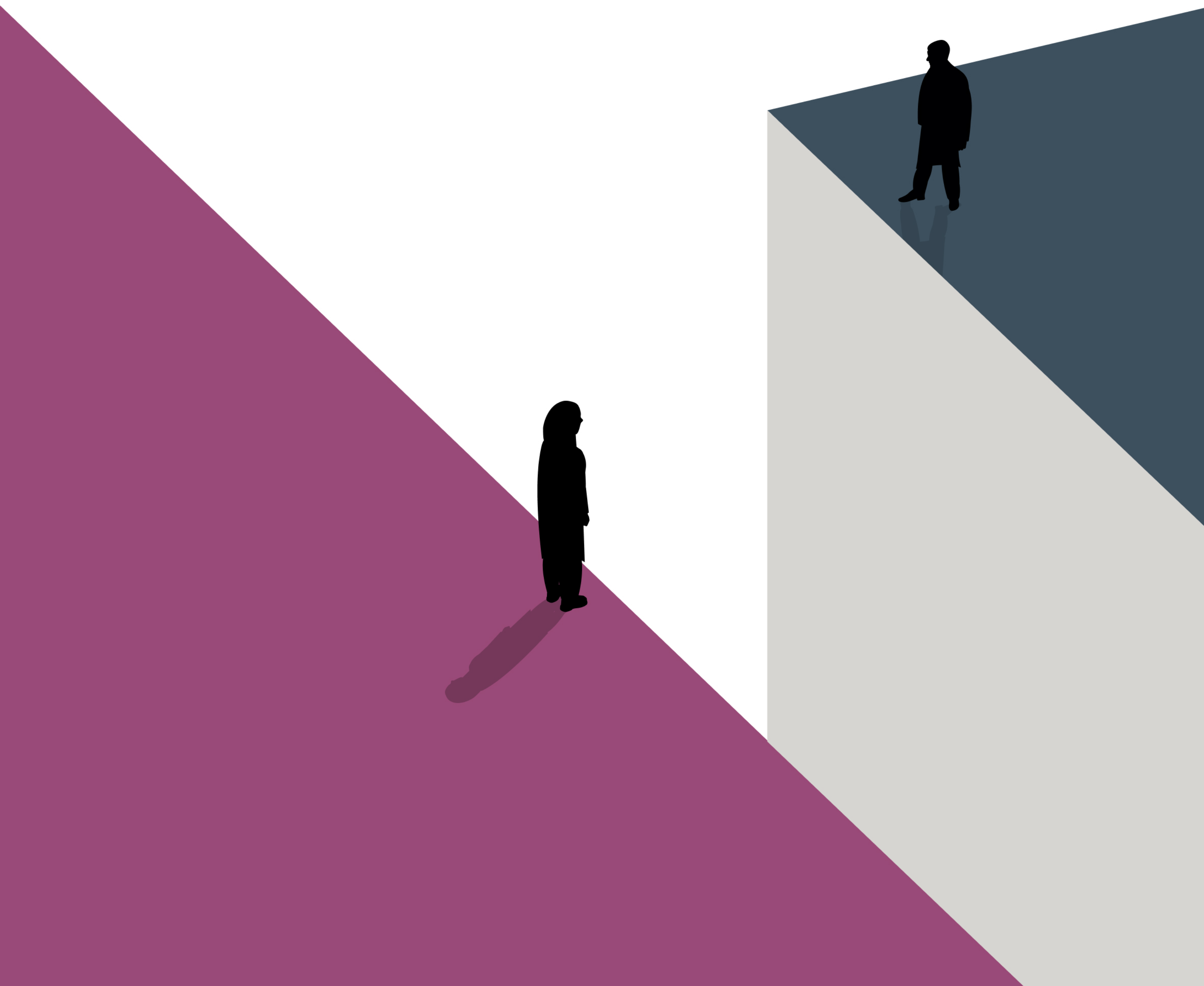
Global Rankings, Local Realities

Gender Parity in Pakistan



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TABADLAB

Bismillah irr Rahman irr Rahim

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List of Abbreviations

AFI	Alliance for Financial Inclusion
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMSME	Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
DCTS	Developing Countries Trading Scheme
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGGI	Global Gender Gap Index
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
GSP+	Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus
GSNI	Gender Social Norms Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
NFIS	National Financial Inclusion Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SERS	Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SME(s)	Small and Medium Enterprise(s)
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN SDSN	United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UNSGSA	UN Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WEF	World Economic Forum
WBL	Women, Business and the Law
WEDDs	Women Entrepreneurs Dedicated Desks
WEDUs	Women Entrepreneurs Development Units
WFID	Women's Financial Inclusion Data
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace & Security

Executive Summary

In 2025, Pakistan ranked last of 148 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), having achieved only 56.7% gender parity overall. Performance across several other global indicators, including the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Women, Peace & Security Index (WPS), and the Human Development Index (HDI) is similarly low. This reports what inhibits the country's progress, and benchmarks Pakistan against six comparator countries – Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Ethiopia – to identify which policy choices have enabled progress elsewhere, and what they imply for Pakistan.

Not all dimensions of the GGGI offer an opportunity to drastically improve score and rank. For instance, Pakistan's Health and Survival and Educational Attainment scores are already close to global norms worldwide, so further progress there would result in minimal gains in ranking. However, Economic Participation and Political Empowerment show high variance across countries, implying that improvement in these two areas would result in disproportionately larger gains in ranking. This finding underpins the focus and recommendations of this report.

Among Pakistan's peers, only Bangladesh improved its overall GGGI rank between 2006 and 2025; Sri Lanka's score fell sharply, while India, Viet Nam and Indonesia posted only modest gains. Bangladesh and Ethiopia advanced through concentrated gains in Political Empowerment specifically, even as their other sub-index scores weakened.

Progress recorded by Bangladesh was built on constitutionally anchored reserved seats for women, nearly three decades of continuous female political leadership, an export garment sector that became the country's largest formal employer of women, and a central bank that was able to drive commercial lending to women through quotas and collateral-free loans. Ethiopia's progress was triggered by a 2018 cabinet reform that placed women in 50% of ministerial portfolios, including senior ones. This reform produced an immediate boost in score, but gains eroded where reforms lacked institutional anchoring, most visibly during the Tigray war. The shared lesson is that political will can move numbers quickly, but gains are only durable when reforms are grounded in law and institutions.

Given Pakistan's development trajectory, the two sub-indices where its performance is weakest –Economic Participation and Political Empowerment – are also where it has the greatest scope for improvement. This report maps six priority areas for action:

- Create demand for women's labour by tying existing trade preferences (EU GSP+, UK DCTS) and export or tax incentives to measurable female-employment targets.
- Improve incentives for women to work through cooperatives and procurement links, and reducing the cost of labour market participation.
- Turn financial inclusion into real enterprise capital by expanding collateral-free SME lending for women, setting bank lending targets, and tracking uptake with gender-disaggregated data.
- Ensure that political representation is meaningful by maximising women's appointment to cabinet positions and other key roles and portfolios of responsibility.

- Anchor reforms in law, not policy documents, by converting existing gender frameworks and executive directives into binding legislation with dedicated budgets and enforcement mechanisms.
- Address social norms directly, through enforcement of existing protective laws and community-embedded models, such as the Lady Health Workers Programme, that normalise women's public and economic roles.

1

Introduction

Gender inequality remains one of the most consequential barriers to economic development in many parts of the world. The evidence linking gender equality to improved socioeconomic outcomes is substantial: as shown in Figure 1, International Monetary Fund (IMF) data demonstrates that lower gender inequality is correlated with higher per capita economic growth rates (2020).

Figure 1: Gender inequality and real GDP per capita growth

Reprinted from: *IMF (2020)*
Source: *World Bank WDI database for GDP growth rates in real terms, IMF for GII in 1990*
Note: *This graph plots the average growth rate of real GDP per capita for emerging-market and developing economies over the 1990s and GII in 1990*

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are not merely issues of human rights, but also of economic efficiency, with constraints such as discriminatory laws, unfavourable social norms, and limited access to assets holding women back and, in turn, holding economies back (IMF, 2020).

This relationship is especially acute for lower-middle-income countries like Pakistan. The IMF estimates that closing the gender gap in labour force participation could boost GDP by up to 30% while the World Bank calculates a cumulative, long-term addition of USD 75–85 billion to the nation's total economic output (Dawn, 2025). Conversely, gender inequality has been shown to trap developing economies in a vicious circle of low aspirations and low economic opportunity for women, reproducing gender disparities across generations (World Bank, 2012).

To track the scale and trajectory of gender inequality systematically, the World Economic Forum (WEF) introduced the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in 2006, making it the longest-standing benchmarking index measuring the state of gender parity across numerous countries (WEF, 2025). Now in its 20th edition, the index covers 148 economies and benchmarks parity between women and men across four key dimensions: Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

The 2025 edition of the GGGI estimates that complete global gender parity remains 123 years away, with no single economy having yet achieved it (WEF, 2025). Pakistan's position is among the most alarming: ranked last out of 148 economies in 2025 with a parity score of 56.7%, Pakistan has closed just over half of its total gender gap (WEF, 2025).

However, Pakistan's GGGI rank and score cannot be read in isolation. When placed alongside a wider set of gender, human development, and legal indices, a consistent picture emerges.

Table 1: Pakistan's rankings across development indices

Index	Publisher	Latest Edition	Pakistan Rank	Score
Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)	World Economic Forum	2025	148 / 148	0.567
Gender Inequality Index (GII)	UNDP Human Development Report	2025	145 / 172	0.536
Gender Development Index (GDI)	UNDP Human Development Report	2025	No rank	0.838
Women, Peace & Security Index (WPS)	Georgetown GIWPS	2023/24	158 / 177	0.481
Human Development Index (HDI)	UNDP Human Development Report	2025	168 / 193	0.544
Sustainable Development Goals Index (SDG)	UN Sustainable Development Report	2025	140/193	56.97
Women, Business & the Law (WBL)	World Bank	2024	No rank	58.80
Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI)	OECD	2023	No rank	59.70

Source: *Authors' compilation based on Global Gender Gap Report 2025 (WEF), Human Development Report 2025 (UNDP), Women, Peace and Security Index 2023/24 (GIWPS and PRIO), Sustainable Development Report 2025 (UN SDSN), Women, Business and the Law 2024 (World Bank), and SIGI 2023 Global Report (OECD)*

As shown in Table 1, the indices converge on a single diagnosis: Pakistan underperforms across the full spectrum of gender and development, including outcome parity, human development loss, legal equality, institutional discrimination, and social norms.

This convergence across methodologically distinct indices, issued by discrete publishers, using a variety of data sources, and employing divergent analytical foci, means that Pakistan's GGGI rank and score reflect a pervasive structural condition rather than a measurement artefact.

This report examines the drivers of Pakistan's stagnation in the GGGI by unpacking how the index is constructed, what its sub-indices capture, and the implications of its scoring and ranking system for policy prioritisation (Section 2). It situates Pakistan's performance within a comparative regional framework, drawing on the trajectories of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Ethiopia to identify which policy choices and sectoral shifts have enabled progress in similar contexts, and what lessons these offer for improving Pakistan's standing (Sections 3 and 4). In doing so, the report charts a direction for improving gender parity in Pakistan (Section 5).

1.1 Pakistan's standing in the Global Gender Gap Index

Pakistan has ranked among the five lowest-performing countries in every edition of the WEF GGGI since its inception. Conflict affected states, including Sudan and Chad, have each closed more of their respective gender gaps than Pakistan. The country has improved its score by only 2.4 percentage points since 2006, one of the slowest rates of progress in the dataset (WEF, 2025).

Pakistan's 2025 sub-index profile is sharply uneven. While the Health and Survival score is 95.9%, in line with the global average of 96.2%, other sub-indices in the GGGI illustrate a greater lag. The Educational Attainment score is 85.1%, lower than the global average of 95.1%. The Economic Participation score is 34.7% – with the global average at 61.0%. Pakistan is placed among the lowest on this measure. Finally, the Political Empowerment score is 11.0%, compared to a global average of 22.9% (WEF, 2025). This distribution shows that there is a greater distance to parity for Economic Participation and Political Empowerment, than there is for Health and Survival, and Educational Attainment.

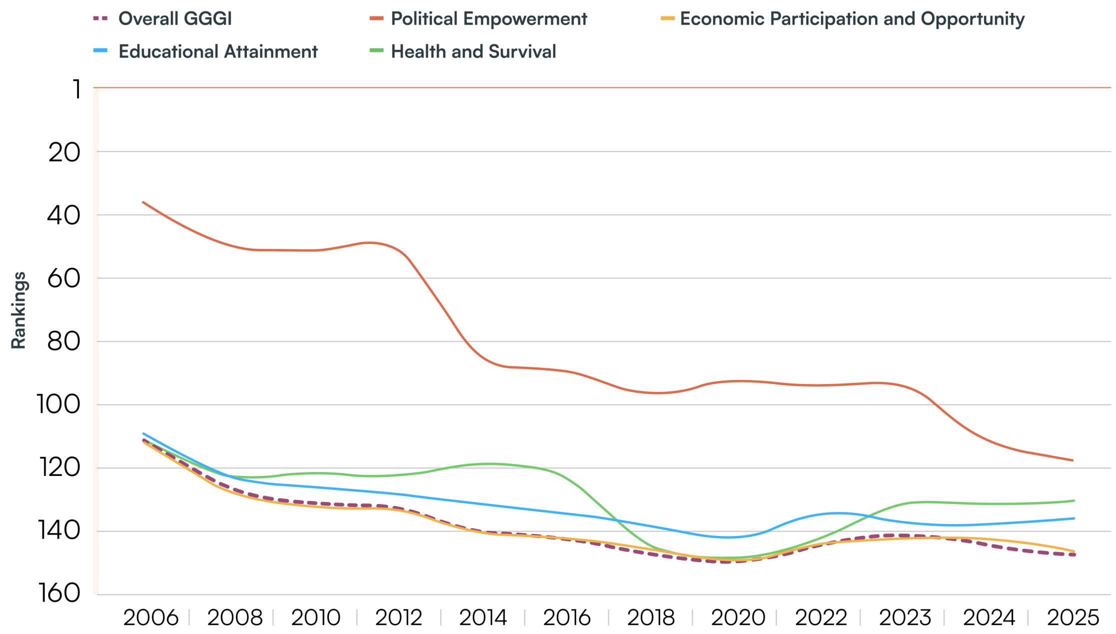
Table 2: Pakistan country profile in the Global Gender Gap Index 2025[1]

Index and Subindex	Score (2025)	Rank (2025)
Global Gender Gap	0.567	148
Economic Participation and Opportunity	0.347	147
Labour-force participation rate (%)	0.304	142
Wage equality for similar work, 1–7 (best)	0.580	106
Estimated earned income (Intl. $1,000)	0.247	141
Legislators, senior officials and managers (%)	0.061	134
Professional and technical workers (%)	0.358	130
Educational Attainment	0.851	137
Literacy rate (%)	0.702	129
Enrolment in primary education (%)	0.875	129
Enrolment in secondary education (%)	0.866	139
Enrolment in tertiary education (%)	0.966	113
Health and Survival	0.959	131
Sex ratio at birth (%)	0.944	1
Healthy life expectancy (years)	0.993	139
Political Empowerment	0.110	118
Women in parliament (%)	0.205	113
Women in ministerial positions (%)	0.000	144
Years with female/male head of state (last 50)	0.104	39

Source: *WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2025*

[1] These sub-indices will be referred to by these names throughout: Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

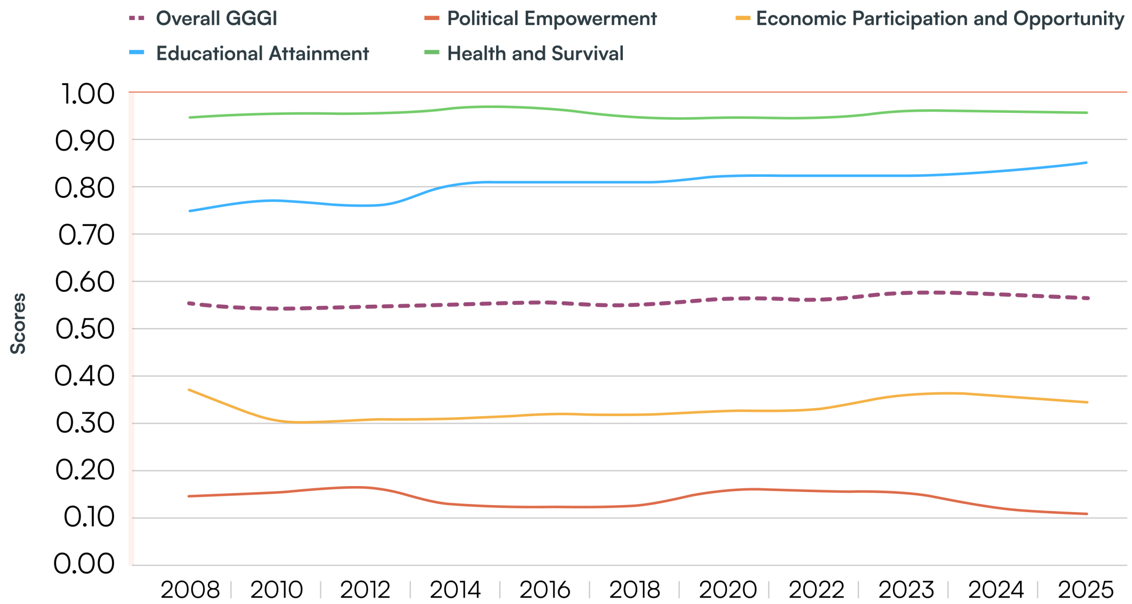
Figure 2: Pakistan: All sub-index rankings (2006–2025)



Source: *GGGI (2006-2025); authors' analysis*

Figure 2 shows that Pakistan's overall GGGI rank fell from 112 in 2006 to 148 in 2025. While Pakistan's position in Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Economic Participation remained fairly stable, Political Empowerment was relatively volatile and drove declines in the overall trend.

Figure 3: Pakistan: Overall GGGI Score Trajectory, 2006–2025



Source: *GGGI (2006-2025); authors' analysis*

Figure 3 shows the consistency in Pakistan's GGGI scores over time and illustrates that the country's overall score trajectory is one of stagnation rather than progress, with its rank falling despite consistent score achievement. Health and Survival, Economic Participation and Political Empowerment remained fairly stable, while the Education Attainment sub-index score improved from 0.706 to 0.851 between 2006 and 2025. Despite this, rankings worsened because these improvements were insufficient relative to those that other countries were making across their sub-indices. Together, Figure 2 and 3 illustrate that serious reforms are needed to improve Pakistan's GGGI scores, and subsequent rankings.

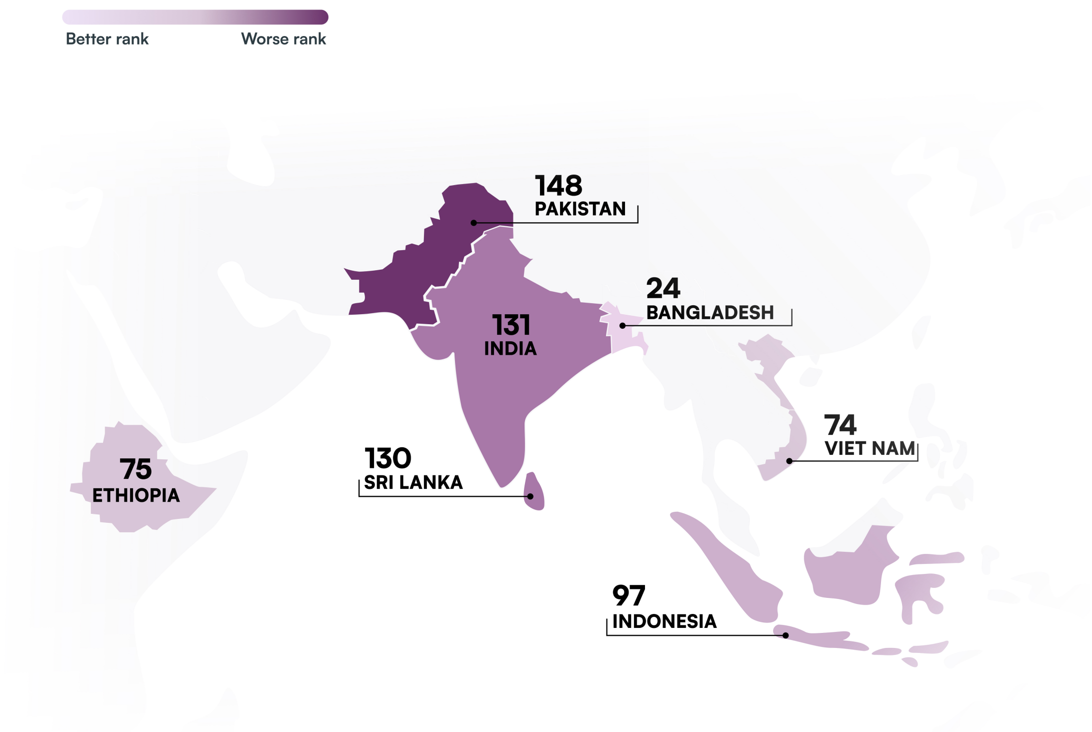
1.2 Selection of comparator countries

The comparison panel selected for this report offers a structurally similar yet policy-diverse set of peers for Pakistan: Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Viet Nam. The countries are a range of lower- to middle-income economies (World Bank, 2026) and share several common development constraints, including large and youthful populations, significant rural populations, and persistent gender gaps in labour force participation, education, and political representation.

At the same time, the panel captures purposeful variation across contexts and outcomes. Some countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, share relatively similar postcolonial institutional contexts. Viet Nam and Bangladesh stand out for showing stronger gains in gender and economic indicators despite comparable income levels. Ethiopia provides contrast as an African low-income comparator.

Other countries, such as Nepal, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Iran, were included in early analyses but later excluded due to a combination of data limitations and analytical considerations.

Figure 4: Panel Country Ranking in GGGI 2025



Source: *WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2025*

2

Understanding the Mechanics of the Global Gender Gap Index

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) scores 14 indicators across four equally weighted sub-indices: Health and Survival, Educational Attainment, Economic Participation, and Political Empowerment.
- Every indicator is a female-to-male ratio capped at 1.0. **It measures the gap between women and men.**
- Rank Traction: Half the world's countries sit within a band of just 0.079 points. A score gain of 0.01 points moves the rank for a country in that band about 13 places, and moves Pakistan, which sits outside it, about two places. Pakistan's rank will not respond to marginal gains.
- Scope for Improvement: Pakistan's score is close to parity in Health and Survival and Educational Attainment, but there is potential for growth in Economic Participation and Political Empowerment.

The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) is a composite measure, reflecting gender parity across 14 indicators, aggregated across four sub-indices: Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment (see Table 2 for an overview of the indicators and Pakistan's scores and rank in 2025). Each indicator is expressed as a female-to-male ratio, capped at 1.0. Within each sub-index, indicators are combined using weights derived from their standard deviation, meaning more stable indicators receive higher weights while more variable ones are down-weighted. The four sub-index scores are then combined into an equally weighted average to produce the overall GGGI score, on a 0 to 1 scale, where 1 represents full parity between women and men.

This outcome-focused architecture measures the relative gaps between men and women across key dimensions, without assessing whether overall conditions are good or bad in absolute terms (World Economic Forum, 2025b). Countries can therefore achieve high scores under very different economic and political conditions, making the index particularly useful for cross-country comparison at equivalent income levels. This has two methodological implications:

- Rank traction: Rankings are sensitive to score distributions – meaning that a given change in score may yield a larger or smaller change in rank, depending on how closely clustered other countries are at that score.
- Scope for Improvement: The structure of the index creates uneven returns to policy effort, with the greatest potential gains for Pakistan concentrated in Economic Participation.

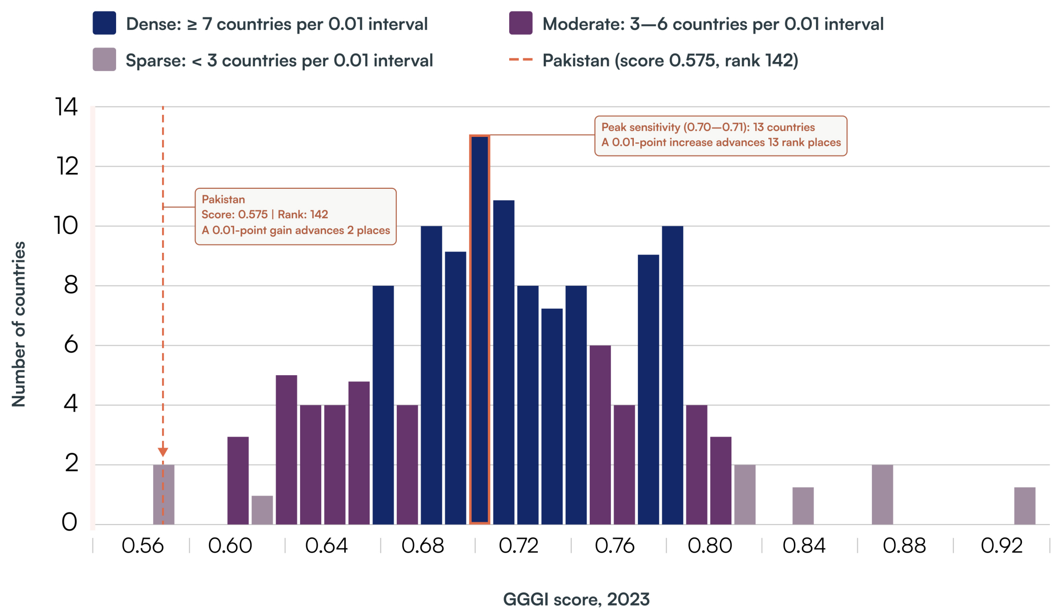
2.1 Rank traction: Possible rank change for a given improvement in score depends on position in the distribution of overall GGGI scores

Based on a simulation using GGGI data (2025), Pakistan's score of 0.567, a 0.01 advancement in score will lead to a 2-place improvement in rank. At a score of 0.750, the same increase in score will lead to a rise of 13 places in rank.

A critical feature of rankings is that they are relative: a country's rank reflects its position compared with all other countries in that year's edition. The implication is that a country can improve its underlying score on the GGGI – meaning it has closed more of its gender gap – and still fall in rank if other countries have improved more. Rank shows position in a competitive field, but score reveals whether genuine progress has been made.

It is, however, less obvious that there is a high degree of score compression in the middle of the global distribution, which has important implications for interpreting country rankings. In the 2023 dataset – the most recent year for which comprehensive cross-country data was available (146 countries) – 74 countries, approximately 50.7% of all economies, fell between a score of 0.679 and 0.758. This relatively narrow band of 0.079 points indicates that a large share of countries is clustered very closely around similar levels of gender parity. This pattern becomes more evident when compared to the complete distribution of the 2023 index, which ranged from approximately 0.568 to 0.935 (a total spread of 0.367 points).

Figure 5: Histogram of GGGI scores of all countries



Source: *GGGI Dataset, Quality of Government Institute, 2023; authors' analysis*
Note: *Thresholds established using cutoffs at 33rd and 66th percentiles, across the range of all scores*

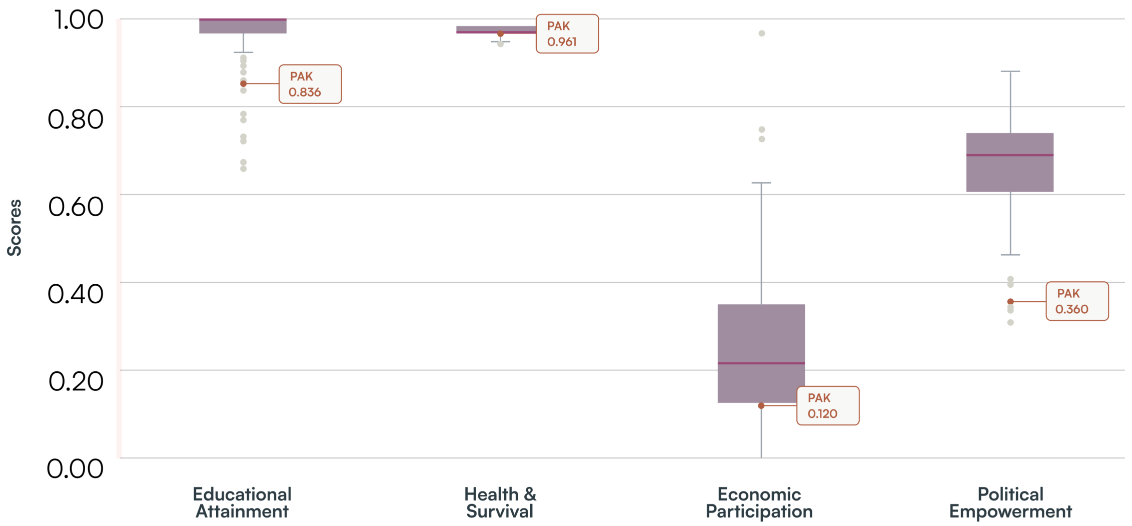
As shown in Figure 5, at the peak level of density, even marginal score changes, such as an increase of 0.01 resulting from a modest improvement in a single indicator, can translate into ranking movements of approximately 13 positions in a given year. Pakistan occupies the sparse zone of the global distribution, with a 2023 score of 0.575 and a rank of 142. An absolute score increase of 0.01 can be expected to translate into movements of only 2 positions.

2.2 Scope for improvement: Some sub-indices have greater potential for growth and generating progress in rank than others

Most countries, including Pakistan, are closer to parity for Educational Attainment and Health and Survival. Distance to parity is greater for the Economic Participation and Political Empowerment sub-indices. Pakistan's score on these sub-indices has more potential for improvement.

An examination of country scores across the GGGI sub-indices helps explain where policy interventions are likely to generate the largest gains. As indicators are capped at parity, and because all four sub-indices are equally weighted, the same absolute point gain in any sub-index contributes equally to a country's overall score. What differs across sub-indices is how much room remains before that ceiling is reached.

Figure 6: Distribution of sub-index scores across 146 countries



Source: *GGGI Dataset, Quality of Government Institute, 2023; authors' analysis*

Figure 6 shows this by plotting the distribution of scores across 146 countries for each sub-index. The position of the box on the vertical axis indicates how close countries are, on average, to parity: the closer a box sits to 1.0, the less room remains for further gains. Countries positioned lower on the chart still have substantial ground to cover before reaching parity, and therefore retain far greater absolute potential for improvement.

Each box represents the middle 50% of country scores on that sub-index, with the horizontal line inside marking the median. The lines extending above and below the box (the whiskers) show the typical range of the remaining scores, while individual circles mark countries whose scores fall outside that typical range. Pakistan's score on each sub-index is marked in red.

In general, scores for Health and Survival and Educational Attainment sit close to parity, including Pakistan with 0.961 and 0.825 respectively (WEF, 2023). With such little distance left to close, even substantial policy effort in these areas can add only marginal points to the overall score. Economic Participation and Political Empowerment, by contrast, sit much further from parity. Pakistan's scores of 0.362 and 0.152 on these two sub-indices leave considerably more room for improvement than its scores on Health and Survival or Educational Attainment (WEF, 2023). Because the distance to parity is much larger here, the same policy effort can close a proportionally larger gap and generate a correspondingly larger increase in the overall score.

Distance to parity explains why Economic Participation and Political Empowerment are the primary drivers of movement in overall GGGI scores. For countries such as Pakistan, positioned well below parity on these two sub-indices, prioritising them offers the greatest scope for measurable progress. This also explains why countries that have achieved rapid gains in rankings, such as Bangladesh and Ethiopia, have done so primarily through interventions in these areas.

Together, these two dimensions of the index – where countries cluster within the global distribution, and which sub-indices carry the most scope for movement – define the strategic landscape for any country seeking to improve its standing in the index. For Pakistan, the implication is clear: meaningful rank gains require structural interventions concentrated in Economic Participation and Political Empowerment, the two sub-indices where global dispersion is greatest and the scope for Pakistan to improve is the largest. The following section examines GGGI trajectories across panel countries between 2006 and 2025 and captures the options available to a lower-income economy aiming to improve its rank.

3

Panel Comparison

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- Like Pakistan, most panel countries – India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam – fell in rank between 2006 and 2025, often despite minor improvements in score.
- Only Bangladesh and Ethiopia rose in rank: Bangladesh by 67 places to rank 24, and Ethiopia by 25 places to rank 75.
- How did this happen? Bangladesh invested in sustained change over two decades through export-led industry, finance, and political representation. Ethiopia's pathway was more urgent – through concentrated political intervention after 2018 – and those gains proved fragile.
- What does this mean for Pakistan? Lasting improvements in gender parity will require committed policy development and sustained implementation through complementary financial, economic, and political measures. Instant gains achieved through executive orders may produce short-term results, but those are unlikely to last.

3.1 Panel trajectories 2006-2025

The rank versus score analysis shown in Table 3 reveals that, like Pakistan, most panel countries fell in ranking despite slight improvements in index scores.

Table 3: Score and rank trajectories, panel countries, 2006–2025

Country	Score 2006		Score 2025	Rank 2006		Rank 2025
Pakistan	0.543	▲	0.567	112	▼	148
Bangladesh	0.627	▲	0.775	91	▲	24
Ethiopia	0.595	▲	0.710	100	▲	75
India	0.601	▲	0.644	98	▼	131
Indonesia	0.654	▲	0.692	68	▼	97
Sri Lanka	0.720	▼	0.567	13	▼	130
Viet Nam	0.678	▲	0.775	68	▼	74

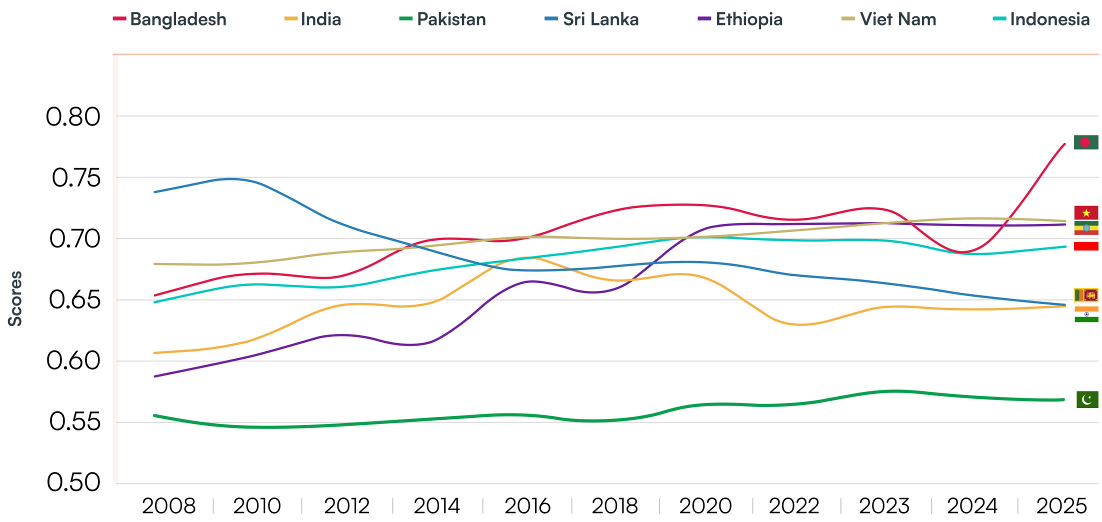
Source: *WEF Global Gender Gap Report (2006-2025); authors' analysis*
Note: *Viet Nam was added to the GGGI in 2008*

In Pakistan, a meagre gain of 2.4 percentage points could not prevent a steep fall in ranking from 112 to 148. Likewise, in India, improvements in score by 4.3 percentage points did not translate into improvements in its rank, which fell from 98 to 131. The same applied to Indonesia (score improvement of 3.8 percentage points) and Viet Nam (score improvement of 9.7 percentage points). For Sri Lanka, the exponential fall in ranking from 13 to 130 was accompanied by a score decline of 15.3 percentage points.

Bangladesh and Ethiopia show that score gains alone do not guarantee rank improvement on the GGGI. Rank is determined by the magnitude of gains relative to the global field.

On the other hand, significant improvements in rank were seen in Bangladesh and Ethiopia. Bangladesh registered a significant rise in rank from 91 in 2006 to 24 in 2025. This is the most notable improvement in the panel dataset, and one of the largest sustained improvements globally. The score improved from 0.627 to 0.775, a gain of 14.8 percentage points, over 19 years. Ethiopia's GGGI score improved from 0.595 in 2006 to 0.710 in 2025, a gain of 11.5 percentage points, with the most significant acceleration occurring after 2018. The rank improved from 100 to 75 over this period, though political instability and the 2020 Tigray War prevented sustained gains.

Figure 7: GGGI scores (panel), 2008-2025



Source: *GGGI (2008-2025); authors' analysis*

The policies implemented in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, contributing to the significant gain in score over the last two decades, are examined in the following sections. The experience of these countries demonstrates that sustained, large-scale improvements in GGGI rankings are achievable under conditions of low income, institutional constraint, and entrenched gender norms – all applicable to Pakistan's context.

3.2 Financial inclusion, economic empowerment, and political representation in Bangladesh

In 1990, Bangladesh recorded a Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.388, reflecting weaknesses across income, education, and labour force participation (Hossain, 2015). In the first edition of the GGGI, Bangladesh ranked 91 with a score of 0.627. Over the following two decades, reinforcing policy mechanisms across the political, economic, and financial domains expanded women's participation on all three fronts simultaneously. By 2025, the HDI had reached 0.685 and Bangladesh ranked 24 on the GGGI with a score of 0.775 – the largest sustained gain in the panel. The case shows what becomes possible when institutional design, labour market transformation, and access to finance are aligned over a long horizon.

3.2.1 Political inclusion

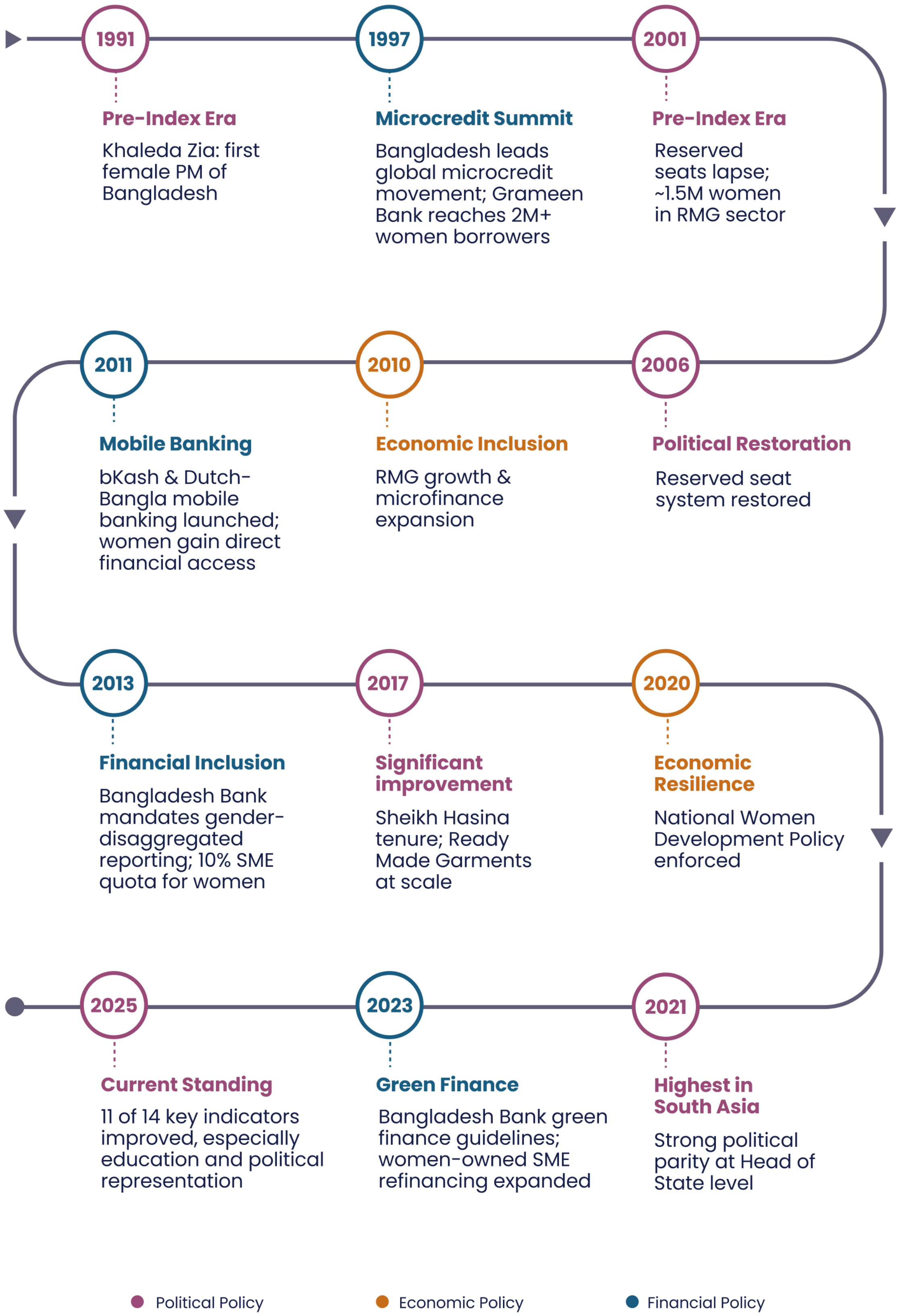
Prior to 1972, women's political participation in Bangladesh was constrained by patriarchal social norms, restricted access to education, and an electoral system that offered few institutional pathways into politics outside elite political networks. The 1972 Constitution introduced reserved parliamentary seats for women, initially allocating 15 seats for a ten-year period in an effort to increase women's political representation. Subsequent constitutional amendments repeatedly extended and expanded the quota system, raising the number of reserved seats to 30 in 1979, and reintroducing them after lapses in 1990 and 2004 (Paasilinna, 2016). However, the repeated use of time-bound provisions reflected an understanding of women's political inclusion as a temporary corrective measure rather than a permanent structural right (Chowdhury, 2019).

The 15th Constitutional Amendment (2011) increased the number of mandated reserved seats for women from 45 to 50 and placed them on a more stable constitutional footing, while the 17th Constitutional Amendment (2018) extended this provision for an additional 25 years (Chowdhury, 2019; UN Women Asia-Pacific, 2021). This made representation a more durable element of the Constitution, creating a consistent legislative floor for women's participation. This trajectory was shaped by state-led institutional design as well as sustained advocacy from women's organisations such as Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, alongside growing international normative pressure following frameworks like the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (Panday, 2013).

Alongside this legislative architecture, Bangladesh's political trajectory was shaped by consistent female leadership at the highest level. Between 1991 and 2024, all parliamentary elections were won by governments led by Sheikh Hasina or Khaleda Zia, producing a cumulative 29-year period of female executive leadership, the longest globally (Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2023; WEF, 2025). As noted by the World Economic Forum (2025), Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia to have achieved political parity at the head-of-state level. This produced a normalisation effect, where female leadership became embedded in political expectations, shaping institutional openness to gender-focused policy.

These developments translated into measurable gains in the GGGI Political Empowerment sub-index. Female parliamentary representation reached 20.9% by 2020 (Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2023), while the cumulative record of female executive leadership became the largest contributor to Bangladesh's Political Empowerment score (WEF, 2025).

Figure 8: Policy journey towards gender equality in Bangladesh



3.2.2 Economic mechanism

Prior to the emergence of the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in the mid-1980s, Bangladesh's economy was defined by three conditions:

- The dominance of subsistence agriculture, where women's labour was largely unpaid and unprotected, and negligible formal sector employment opportunities
- Male control over household financial decisions, which limited the autonomy gains from informal income generation (Goetz & Gupta, 1996)
- Social norms restricting female mobility, particularly through purdah practices in conservative communities

The emergence of the RMG sector transformed these conditions. As countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong, and later China reached their quota limits, international buyers began shifting production to countries with unused export capacity. The Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) consequently emerged in 1974 as a global trade system designed to protect textile industries in developed countries from rising competition by placing export quotas on major garment-producing economies. Enabled by these global trade dynamics, Bangladesh became a cost-competitive location for garment production at a moment when female labour was both abundant and underutilised (Islam, 2024).

The private sector in Bangladesh leveraged the MFA by building a cost-efficient, export-oriented garment sector, supported by targeted national policy. The Special Bonded Warehouse Scheme and duty-free import of inputs lowered production costs, while investments in backward linkages – earlier stages of production such as spinning, weaving, and dyeing – reduced reliance on imports and improved turnaround times. Simultaneously, duty-free, quota-free access to key markets like the EU gave Bangladesh a competitive edge over larger producers, enabling rapid expansion of its RMG industry (Export Booms, 2022).

As production expanded, competitive wages, preferential trade access, and an abundant labour supply reinforced Bangladesh's competitiveness in global apparel markets. Foreign firms, particularly from South Korea, played a catalytic role in transferring technical knowledge and production practices, accelerating the sector's integration into global supply chains (Islam, 2024).

By 2017, the RMG sector employed approximately 4.2 million workers, around 60% of whom were women, and had become the dominant driver of Bangladesh's merchandise export earnings (ILO, 2017). Bangladesh did not rely solely on improving women's capabilities; it created a labour market that required their participation, allowing economic inclusion to scale rapidly.

In Bangladesh, export-led industrialisation generated formal employment pathways that enabled women's employment at a scale that supply-side interventions alone could not achieve.

The effects of this transformation extended beyond labour force participation. Proximity to garment factories significantly increased girls' school enrolment and delayed marriage, thereby reshaping household decision-making and life trajectories (Heath and Mobarak, 2015). Improvements were seen in women's income, savings, access to healthcare, and participation in household decision-making (Mustafa, 2016). This helped set the stage for expanding financial inclusion.

3.2.3 Financial formalisation

The banking system in Bangladesh historically excluded women through collateral requirements tied to property ownership, which women rarely possessed due to both customary and statutory constraints (Goetz and Gupta, 1996). Microfinance institutions, particularly Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), emerged to address this gap – by the 1990s, over 95% of Grameen Bank's borrowers were women (Hossain, 2015). However, while microfinance expanded access, it remained limited in loan size and constrained enterprise growth.

Bangladesh Bank's (Central Bank of Bangladesh) policy response addressed this constraint by integrating women into the formal financial system. In 2014, collateral-free loans for women entrepreneurs up to BDT 2.5 million (equivalent to approximately PKR 3.25 million or USD 32,200 in 2014) were introduced, enabling access to larger-scale capital (Alliance for Financial Inclusion [AFI], 2017; UNSGSA, 2016). This was supported by a coherent institutional push (Bangladesh Bank, 2019; AFI, 2017) including the following key elements:

- **Women Entrepreneurs Development Units (WEDUs)**: Bangladesh Bank established WEDUs under its Small and Medium Enterprises and Special Programmes Department and instructed all scheduled banks and financial institutions to establish Women Entrepreneurs Dedicated Desks (WEDDs) at all branches, providing dedicated institutional support infrastructure (Bangladesh Bank, 2019; AFI, 2017).
- **Mandatory Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CMSME) Loan Quotas**: Bangladesh Bank mandated that at least 10% of total CMSME loan portfolios be allocated to women entrepreneurs, with a target of raising this to 15% by 2024 (Bangladesh Bank, 2019).
- **Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme (SERS)**: Bangladesh Bank launched a BDT 3,000 crore (equivalent to approximately PKR 77.7 billion or USD 277.7 million) refinancing scheme for women entrepreneurs, under which banks can borrow from the central bank at 0.5% and on-lend to women entrepreneurs at a capped 5% (The Business Standard, 2023).
- **Cash Incentive Facility**: A 1% incentive, calculated on the principal loan amount, was paid to both women entrepreneurs who repaid CMSME loans within the stipulated time and to the lending institution, creating aligned incentives for successful credit relationships (Bangladesh Bank, 2019).
- **Women's Financial Inclusion Data (WFID) Dashboard**: Bangladesh Bank introduced a real-time, sex-disaggregated data tracking system to monitor progress and guide gender-responsive policy (The Financial Express, 2025).

These interventions produced measurable gains in financial inclusion and contributed to increased labour force participation and entrepreneurship among women. Other empowerment effects for women were also observed, such as improvements in household decision-making, greater social confidence, and improved awareness of rights (Pervin et al, 2023).

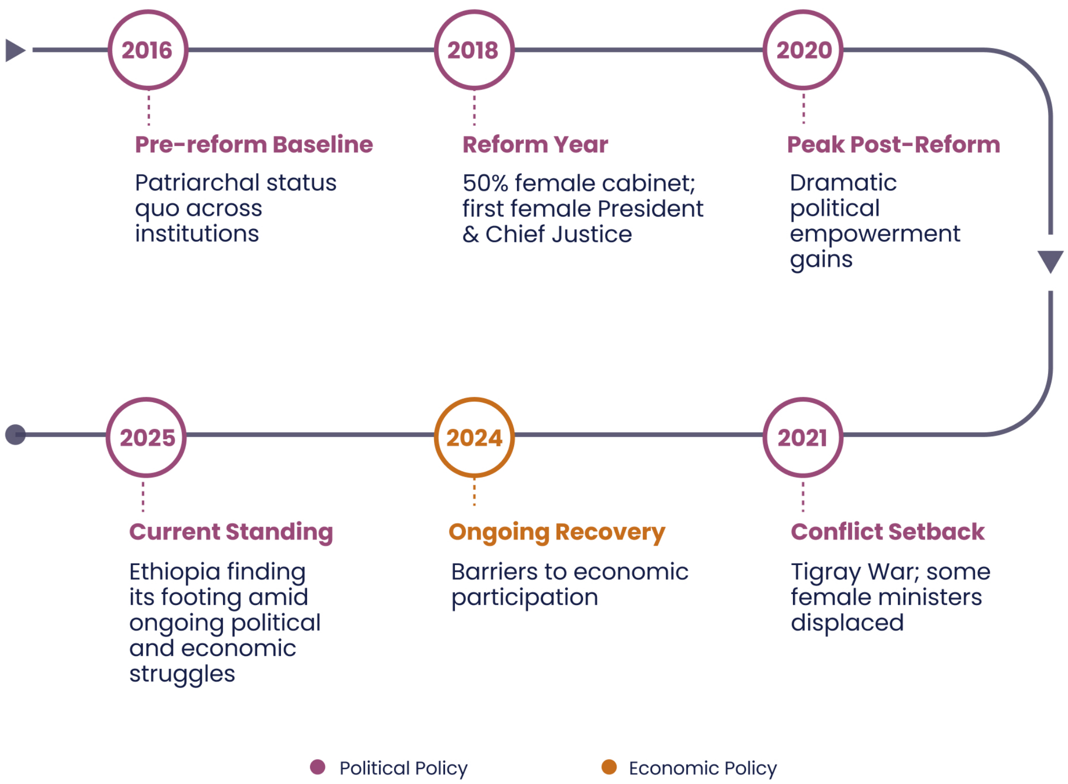
3.2.4 Looking beyond the data

Two important caveats qualify the Bangladesh analysis. First, the documented gains in economic participation reflect entry into employment rather than the quality of that employment. Women in the RMG sector continue to face wage gaps of up to 30% relative to male counterparts and remain concentrated in low-skill roles (Ethical Trading Initiative, 2025). Second, financial inclusion data shows persistent gaps: despite the policy architecture described above, women account for only 17.9% of loan accounts and 6.5% of total loan assets (MicroSave Consulting, 2025). Thus, policy interventions have expanded access but have not yet produced proportionate outcomes in credit share or enterprise scale.

3.3 Building gender inclusive institutions in Ethiopia

In 2015, Ethiopia recorded an HDI score of 0.448, with life expectancy at 64.6 years, mean years of schooling at 2.6, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita at USD 1,523 in purchasing power parity terms (UNDP, 2016). It had ranked 100 on the GGGI in 2006 with a score of 0.595, and stood at roughly 0.66 by 2016. Political Empowerment was the weakest dimension: women held around 23% of parliamentary seats and 19% of ministerial roles, and were largely excluded from high-authority portfolios (Nigatu & Mamuye, 2024). From 2018, a concentrated set of executive appointments moved the Political Empowerment score sharply upward within two years. By 2025, Ethiopia ranked 75 with a score of 0.710. The case shows how political empowerment can shift quickly under direct executive action and, post 2020, how quickly those gains can reverse without institutional anchoring.

Figure 9: Key policy milestones toward gender equality in Ethiopia



Across 2006–2025, Ethiopia's index movement came almost entirely from one sub-index. Political Empowerment reached a score of 0.431 in 2023, almost triple its 0.146 score a decade earlier (WEF, 2023). There was limited contribution by the other sub-indices. Health and Survival was close to parity at 0.971, leaving no headroom. Educational Attainment remained among the lowest globally, trailing 135 countries at 0.865 (WEF, 2024). Economic Participation stood at 0.587, ranked 118th globally (WEF, 2024). Ethiopia's gains were political, not economic, which is why this section focuses on the political pathway.

3.3.1 Policy intervention: The 50% Cabinet Mandate

In October 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed introduced a cabinet in which 50% of ministerial positions were held by women, a reform implemented in the context of political transition and institutional restructuring (Washington Post, 2018). The cabinet was reduced from 28 to 20 members, with 10 positions allocated to women, and approved unanimously by parliament. The intervention went beyond numerical parity and ensured the allocation of substantive portfolios, with women appointed to key ministries, including defence, peace, trade, and revenue, signalling a redistribution of political authority rather than mere symbolic inclusion (Democracy in Africa, 2018). Ethiopia thus became the second African country, after Rwanda, to achieve gender parity in its cabinet (Euronews, 2018). Moreover, the new cabinet represented significant ethnic and religious diversity, promoting inclusivity and national unification.

3.3.2 The multi-institutional signalling effect

Cabinet reform in 2018 was reinforced by additional high-level appointments across state institutions. Within weeks, Ethiopia appointed its first female president and Chief Justice. These appointments came within weeks of each other, and extended gender parity across executive and judicial domains – women's leadership therefore registered as a governance decision rather than a gender initiative confined to one ministry. This alignment across institutions amplified the legitimacy of women’s leadership, helping shift public perception and institutional norms (Nigatu & Mamuye, 2024). The 2018 reforms produced one of the most rapid improvements in the GGGI recorded in a Sub-Saharan African context, with Ethiopia’s overall score increasing from 0.662 in 2016 to 0.710 in 2020 (WEF 2016, 2020). Gains were driven primarily by the Political Empowerment sub-index, demonstrating how executive action at the top of government can improve index performance quickly.

3.3.3 Fragile gains

The trajectory of political inclusion in Ethiopia was abruptly cut short by the Tigray War in November 2020. The UN Women Rapid Gender Assessment found that women’s representation in decision-making in Tigray collapsed from 48% before the war to under 5% after it (UN Women Ethiopia, 2023).

> *The 2018 increase in representation in Ethiopia was built through appointment and convention, not binding guarantee, leaving it exposed the moment conflict disrupted governance. Constitutional embedding is required for sustainability.*

Several prominent women officials, including president of the Federal Supreme Court and the chairperson of the National Election Board, resigned from their positions in 2023. Nevertheless, Ethiopia held its rank in the 2025 GGGI index signaling resilience and a strong foundation for recovery, with space to rebuild and potentially deepen earlier gains in a more stable post-conflict phase.

4

Lessons for Pakistan

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- Create economic incentives for hiring females in industry
- Implement Home-based Workers' Legislation to facilitate women's graduation out of informal work
- Improve financial access through implementation of mandatory bank lending targets
- Ensure political representation through assignment of authority to female MPs
- Anchor gender policy frameworks in legal and regulatory frameworks
- Provide leadership and commitment to shift social norms

Section 2 established that Pakistan's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) score is primarily held back by two sub-index failures: a severe and worsening Political Empowerment score (0.159 to 0.110, sub-rank 93 to 118, between 2020–2025), and a chronically low Economic Participation score (0.327 to 0.347, sub-rank 150 to 147, between 2020–2025). Educational Attainment and Health and Survival are closer to global norms, leaving limited leverage for a gain in ranking in either dimension. The Political Empowerment and Economic Participation sub-indices are where Pakistan is furthest from parity, and also where the global distribution offers the most room for movement. Targeted interventions in these two areas is most likely to produce measurable change. Drawing on policy insights from Ethiopia and Bangladesh, this section provides a detailed blueprint for improving Pakistan's performance in the Political Empowerment and Economic Participation sub-indices of the GGGI.

4.1 Upgrade economic policy to stimulate absorption of female labour

GGGI Indicator: Labour force participation rate	***0.304*** *2025 score*	***142*** *7th lowest rank*

Pakistan has stimulated female economic participation almost entirely through supply-side measures – skills and access to capital. Demand-side action, the deliberate creation of jobs that absorb women, remains limited.

The supply-side gains are real. Women's active bank accounts increased from 20 million to 37 million between 2021 and 2025 under the State Bank of Pakistan's Banking on Equality Policy (The Express Tribune, 2025), and female entrepreneurship rose from 19% to 25%

between 2020-21 and 2024-25 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2025). But these reflect entry into micro-level self-employment, not formal-sector absorption. Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector experience shows that large-scale increases in female participation occur when sectors expand and are structured to absorb female labour. Currently, Pakistan's female employment sits largely in the informal, home-based segments of value chains (ILO, 2017), but evidence shows that, due to greater gender parity in education, women have better access to job opportunities and stand to gain from growth in jobs (Majid and Sigmann, 2021).

Closing this gap requires demand-side levers:

- Tax rebates and export-linked benefits conditional on female hiring
- Mandated family-friendly workplace policies and implementation
- Targeting these incentives to the fastest-growing sectors – digital services, food processing, light manufacturing – while their labour structures are still forming
- Deepening regional trade integration to generate the export volume that pulls women into formal work (The News, 2025)

Trade conditionality is the most underused lever. As the largest Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) beneficiary, Pakistan exports over 85% of eligible goods to the European Union (EU) duty-free (European Commission, 2025), conditional on 27 conventions including ILO 100 and 111 and CEDAW. Enforcement is weak (ILO, 2023). Tying GSP+ commitments to measurable female employment targets in textiles would convert a dormant obligation into a demand-side instrument.

4.2 Rigorous implementation of legislation to improve working conditions for women

GGGI Indicator: Wage equality for similar work	***0.580*** *2025 score*	***106*** *43rd lowest rank*

The GGGI indicator, 'Wage equality for similar work', is measured through the World Economic Forum's (WEF) global Executive Opinion Survey, using responses to the question, "In your country, for similar work, to what extent are wages for women equal to those of men?" (1 = not at all, significantly below those of men; 7 = fully, equal to those of men) (WEF, 2025). The indicator thus represents a measure of the perception of equality.

Pakistan has made legislative progress in formalising the conditions of women's work, particularly for those in informal and home-based roles. Four provinces have enacted home-based workers' legislation, making Pakistan the first country globally to have four provincial laws protecting home-based workers, the majority of whom are women (Voice PK, 2023). The Maternity and Paternity Leave Act 2023 extended paid maternity leave to 180 days for first births and introduced the first statutory paternity entitlement in Pakistan's history (Arab News, 2023). The Day Care Centres Act 2023 mandated on-site childcare facilities at private establishments with 70 or more employees, directly addressing a structural barrier to women's continued workforce participation after childbirth (Paul Hastings, 2024). Although these Acts operate at the federal level, they establish a national benchmark and a normative framework toward which provincial governments can align their own legislation.

Pakistan's female labour force participation remains concentrated in informal and low-productivity sectors, particularly agriculture and home-based work. The agriculture sector serves as the largest employer, absorbing roughly 37% of the total labour force, with more than 50% of women working in agriculture classified as "contributing family workers," often performing unpaid labour (PAR, 2023). Bangladesh showed the same pattern before the RMG sector expanded and pulled large numbers of women out of unpaid family work and into formal employment. Improving outcomes requires enhancing the nature of economic participation through structured incentives. This includes:

- Facilitating women's transition from unpaid family work into income-generating and semi-formal roles through cooperative models, value-chain integration, and institutional procurement systems
- Supporting skill progression within existing industries, particularly in textiles, services, and light manufacturing
- Enforcing equal wage regulations and improving monitoring mechanisms in formal sectors
- Providing safer, affordable transport in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas

In Nepal, school feeding programmes supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) link women farmers to public procurement. The immediate effect is stable demand, but the more significant one is formalisation: supplying schools requires registered membership, contractual supply arrangements, and compliance with quality standards. Meeting those requirements moves women from unpaid family labour into structured, market-linked economic activity (FAO, 2024). Without addressing the quality and structure of employment, gains in participation are unlikely to produce sustained improvements in perceived equality – necessary for performance on indices such as the GGGI.

4.3 Expand women's access to formal finance

Potential Target Indicator: Estimated earned income	*0.247*	*141*
	2025 score	*8th lowest rank*

The estimated earned income indicator is a proxy for how much command women have over a country's economic resources and is computed using female and male shares of the economically active population, the ratio of the female to male wages, gross domestic product, and female and male shares of population (WEF, 2025). Increases in female labour force participation and greater parity in wages will translate into improvement in this indicator.

Measurable progress has been made in women's financial inclusion in Pakistan, driven by two instruments working in tandem: the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) (2015, updated 2024–28), which set sector-wide targets, and the State Bank of Pakistan's Banking on Equality Policy (2021), which made gender mainstreaming binding on individual banks. Underpinning this progress is a rapidly closing digital access gap: Pakistan recorded the largest reduction in the mobile ownership gender gap of any country surveyed in the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2026 (37% to 27% in a single year), with the mobile internet gender gap narrowing from 25% to 8% (GSMA, 2026).

Under NFIS 2024–28, Pakistan targets 75% overall financial inclusion and a reduction of the gender gap to 25% by 2028. Against those targets, the access gains are substantial.

Women's financial inclusion rose from 39% in 2021 to 52% in 2025, narrowing the gender gap to 30 percentage points. Microfinance lending to women expanded from 0.9 million to over 3 million borrowers (State Bank of Pakistan, 2025). Financing to women entrepreneurs reached PKR 230 billion (approximately USD 824 million) across 974,000 loans disbursed between November 2024 and October 2025. A 2020 amendment to the Companies Act removed the requirement for women to provide a father's or husband's name during business registration, equalising the incorporation process between men and women (We-Fi, 2021).

These are genuine institutional advances, but access has not converted into enterprise finance –93% of lending to women remains in microfinance (Ahmad, 2025). Collateral requirements, limited asset ownership, and institutional bias within lending systems continue to cap women at the micro level. Experience from Bangladesh suggests the need for regulatory intervention at the central bank level. In Pakistan, this could include:

- Expanding collateral-free loan schemes for women-led SMEs through the State Bank of Pakistan.
- Introducing mandatory targets for commercial banks on lending to women entrepreneurs.
- Developing gender-disaggregated financial reporting systems to track access and uptake.

These measures would allow women to expand and formalise economic activity, critical to improving Economic Participation indicators.

4.4 Strengthen pathways for political representation

Potential Target Indicator: Women in parliament	***0.205*** *2025 score*	***113*** *36th lowest rank*

Pakistan’s constitutional architecture for women's political inclusion is fairly advanced: the National Assembly reserves 60 seats (17.9% of total) for women, the Senate 17, and provincial assemblies carry additional allocations – Punjab (66, 17.8% of total), Sindh (29, 17.3% of total), KP (26, 17.9% of total), and Balochistan (11, 16.9%) – with election laws requiring parties to allocate at least 5% of their tickets to women candidates (Constitution of Pakistan, Articles 51, 59, 106; Elections Act 2017, s.206). These mechanisms produced an improvement in Pakistan's GGGI Political Empowerment score in 2023, when reserved parliamentary seats and a brief uptick in ministerial appointments contributed to an overall score of 0.575 (WEF, 2025). The subsequent decline to 0.567 in 2025, when women's ministerial representation fell to zero, is the clearest illustration of the system's central weakness: a reserved seat architecture that functions as a representational floor rather than a pathway to substantive political authority (WEF, 2025).

Evidence from Bangladesh and Ethiopia suggests that both the stability and substance of representation matter. Strengthening Political Empowerment would require:

- Increasing the proportion of directly elected seats contested by women, rather than reliance solely on reserved allocations
- Ensuring that women in reserved seats have access to decision-making roles within parliamentary committees

- Supporting candidate pipelines through party-level reforms and leadership development programmes

Given the high variance in Political Empowerment globally, even modest increases in effective representation can lead to significant improvements in rank.

4.5 Institutional redesign for women in decision-making roles

Potential Target Indicator: Women in ministerial positions	0.000 2025 score	144 5th lowest rank

A key lesson from Bangladesh and Ethiopia is that political will can drive rapid gains in gender equality, but that progress is more durable where such commitments are institutionally and constitutionally anchored.

Pakistan has made efforts to anchor gender commitments within institutional frameworks at both federal and provincial levels. Four provinces finalised Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy implementation frameworks in 2020, through consultative processes involving multiple government departments (UN Women Pakistan, 2021). At the federal level, Pakistan's first National Security Policy (2022–2026) explicitly integrates gender equity into national security narratives (UN Women Asia-Pacific, n.d.). The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act 2022 extended the 2010 law's reach by broadening the definition of harassment to include gender-based discrimination not limited to sexual conduct (Paul Hastings, 2024), and the NFIS 2024–28 has embedded gender-disaggregated reporting requirements into financial sector oversight (State Bank of Pakistan, 2025). These represent advances in institutional architecture, but most commitments remain housed in policy documents and executive frameworks.

Achieving durability requires:

- Ensuring equal participation of women in cabinet and assignment of consequential ministerial responsibility
- Anchoring gender-related reforms within legal and regulatory frameworks instead of executive directives
- Establishing monitoring systems with clear accountability mechanisms across ministries
- Integrating gender targets into sectoral policies across labour, industry, and finance, building on precedents such as the State Bank's Banking on Equality Policy

Such measures will reduce dependence on political leadership and increase the likelihood that gains are maintained over time.

4.6 Implement systemic approaches to influence social norms

GGGI Indicator: Overall Index Score	0.567 2025 overall score	148 Lowest rank

Social norms shape the appetite for attempted reform. In the UNDP Gender Social Norms survey, 92% of respondents in Pakistan expressed bias against women's economic and leadership roles (UNDP, 2023), placing the country among the most norm-restrictive globally. At that scale of bias, any reforms in labour markets, finance, and political representation will meet implementation gaps, because households, employers and institutions continue operating within restrictive expectations (Majid, 2026).

Pakistan has changed norms at scale before, and both precedents worked the same way – by embedding women in state-sanctioned roles rather than confronting norms directly.

- The Lady Health Workers Programme employs approximately 125,000 women as community health workers. It produced measurable shifts in women's decision-making authority and community leadership. Its mechanism was normalisation: women's public presence became routine over time (Social Protection, 2018).
- The Polio Eradication Programme extended the model, building a female-majority health workforce that reached deeply conservative communities by working through community influencers and religious legitimacy rather than against them (Tabassum et al., 2025).

International experience confirms this pattern. In Iran, total fertility fell from roughly 6.5 births per woman in the mid-1980s to replacement level by 2000, driven by a family planning programme embedded in primary healthcare and backed by sustained religious and state endorsement – including mandatory premarital counselling (Abbasi-Shavazi & McDonald, 2006; WHO EMRO, 2012). State legitimacy helped change public attitudes.

Norms are anchored in physical and economic structures. Changes to norms, therefore, require parallel investment in:

- Enforcement of existing laws, including the Protection Against Harassment Act 2010, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, and Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act 2019.
- Norm-correcting public campaigns that use descriptive norms to reduce perceived social disfavour toward women's economic activity (World Bank, 2015), reinforced by women's visibility in media and public life.
- Community engagement on household decision-making, designed around intra-household bargaining and norm deliberation (Duflo, 2012; Bicchieri, 2016).
- High-level political commitment with dedicated resources. The recent inauguration of the National Population Council signals this at the federal level (PMO, 2026).

Norm shifts have longer horizons than policy cycles. However, without this parallel effort, public bias will continue to impede the implementation of targeted reforms.

5

Conclusion

Pakistan's position in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) reflects a trend in gender inequality, exacerbated by its performance across specific dimensions of the index. Pakistan performs better in Health and Survival, and Educational Attainment, where incremental improvements have already translated into a relatively high score. As a result, further gains in these dimensions are unlikely to produce large movements in overall score or global ranking. By contrast, Pakistan remains substantially behind in Economic Participation and Political Empowerment. Even moderate improvements across these sub-indices can generate meaningful changes in overall performance. Moreover, because of the distribution of countries on the GGGI, improvements in ranking for Pakistan require large improvements in score. This means that Pakistan will not experience significant movement through small increases across multiple dimensions. Instead, it requires focused and sustained progress in two key areas: Economic Participation and Political Empowerment.

This report does not argue against investment in girls' education or maternal health – these remain important development priorities and foundational for improving other dimensions that require drastic reform. Rather, it suggests that, given Pakistan's current position in these dimensions relative to the global distribution, such investments are unlikely to drive improvement in a parity-based ranking system in the near term. At this stage of Pakistan's development trajectory, policy focus on Economic Participation and Political Empowerment is most likely to produce relatively significant outcomes on the GGGI.

Evidence from other regional comparators reinforces this pathway. Improvements in Bangladesh's GGGI performance between 2006 and 2025 were the result of a triad of policy frameworks intentionally and consistently applied across the political, economic, and financial sectors, leveraging opportunities created in international markets and reaping the gains from women's inclusion across multiple facets of economic growth and human development. In the case of Ethiopia, concerted efforts for women's inclusion in institutional leadership and political participation helped the country make dramatic strides in its ranking.

Pakistan's baseline constraints are shaped by labour market structure, sectoral concentration, and socially mediated access to work. Improvements in political participation, accompanied by parallel expansion in economic opportunity, offer a route to increasing gender parity. Greater integration of women into the formal labour market, alongside clearer institutional pathways into leadership roles could support associated gains in economic growth and human development. Ultimately, regulations and incentives must be designed to enhance women's participation in the economy and in politics, in sustained and legislatively mandated ways. The policy challenge is therefore not broad-based improvement across all dimensions, but sustained and institutionalised gains in the two areas where Pakistan is furthest from parity, and where even incremental progress has the greatest potential to shift its global position.

This report offers several cross-sectoral recommendations for improving gender parity across Economic Participation and Political Empowerment in Pakistan. For these recommendations to succeed, improved gender parity must be a clearly articulated goal, championed by national leadership and governance, resting strongly within institutional structures. Ministries and departments must be aligned and coherent in their approach, allocating adequate resources. Policies must be captured in legislation, so that they cannot be easily reversed due to changing priorities. Finally, their implementation must be tracked and used as the basis for public accountability by civil society and watchdog groups.

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