



## Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework *2024-2028*





# **Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework 2024-2028**



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## Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organization
DVECs	District Voter Education Committees
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
GMSIF	Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework
GSi	Gender and Social Inclusion (Wing of ECP)
GDEWG	Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICEARD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
MRVs	Mobile Registration Vans
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NIC	National Identity Card
NRC	NADRA Registration Centers
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
PSA	Public Service Announcement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNIC	Special National identity Card
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
UDHR	Universal Declaration for Human Right



**Sikandar Sultan Raja**  
Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan

## Message from the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner

It is becoming widely accepted that lasting peace and political stability, integral for the national prosperity, are only possible when democratic institutions are inclusive of all segments of the society, such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, marginalized groups, and individuals with disabilities.

The Constitution of Pakistan protects the rights of all citizens without any discrimination. In line with the legal and constitutional mandate to hold elections honestly, justly and fairly, ECP is committed to take key policy and programmatic measures to ensure fair participation of all segments of the society in the electoral processes.

Towards this goal, our efforts are focused on making the electoral system more efficient, fair, and gender-responsive, enabling women and girls and other marginalized segments of the society to actively contribute to achieving democratic goals. Hence, our foremost priority is to strengthen, consolidate, and advocate for gender-responsive and inclusive institutional policies and programs.

To this end, ECP has taken several measures to formulate policies and programs for active participation of all the segments of the society at different levels and from different geographical regions in the electoral processes.

However, I recognize that gender and inclusion policies must be guided by a strategic vision. Therefore, I am honored to announce the Election Commission's first-ever "Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework". This framework reflects our commitment to implementing inclusive, sustainable, and impactful actions that empower women, girls, minorities, transgender persons and persons with disabilities.

This important framework, aligned with Pakistan's legal framework including the Constitution, electoral laws and laws and the international commitments, reflects ECP's commitment to ensure free, fair, and inclusive electoral processes.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my team and the development partner for their consistent hard work, commitment, and support in realizing this important framework that will guide our future actions.



**Omar Hamid Khan**  
Secretary Election Commission of Pakistan

## Foreword

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is an autonomous body, constitutionally mandated to conduct elections in Pakistan honestly, justly and fairly. Over the past decade, ECP has implemented numerous initiatives to promote inclusive and gender-responsive elections. A crucial step in this direction was the establishment of the Gender and Social Inclusion Wing (GSI). In addition to bridging the gender gap in electoral rolls, institutionalize gender sensitization trainings, ensure safe and secure work environment for all, increase women's representation within ECP, and adopt inclusive civic and voter education strategies are a few initiatives among many others.

Emphasizing the importance of increased representation of women and other marginalized groups in the electoral processes, ECP is committed to ensuring that its aspirational goals of inclusive elections and representation become reality. To this end, we are actively transforming ourselves into a more inclusive and gender-friendly organization. In line with our commitment, ECP is also adopting gender-responsive budgeting. The establishment of a dedicated Gender Wing within ECP underscores our dedication to effectively implementing the Gender and Inclusion Policy and its associated work plan.

To foster coherence and coordinated efforts in mainstreaming gender and inclusion across all ECP operations, policies, and programs, ECP takes pride in introducing a comprehensive '**Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework**'. This framework will serve as a guiding tool to effectively implement and monitor ECP's institutional and programmatic endeavors aimed at achieving gender-responsive and inclusive elections.

I am pleased to extend my sincerest thanks to the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner and the Members, Gender and Social Inclusion Wing for leading it, and heads of all wings for their input. ECP also expresses gratitude to Gender and Disability Working Group, Parliamentarians and government officials for their collaboration in formulating this Framework. Additionally, I would like to thank our development partner, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), for their crucial technical assistance in advancing our inclusion efforts and formulation of this crucial Framework.



**Nighat Siddique**

Additional Director General,  
Gender and Social Inclusion Wing,  
Election Commission of Pakistan



## Acknowledgement

The "**Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework**" would not have been possible without the generous encouragement and guidance of Mr. Sikandar Sultan Raja, the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner. His vision to transform ECP into a gender-responsive and inclusive institution is pivotal in strengthening democracy in our country. Special recognition goes to the Members of the Elections Commission for their guidance, valuable comments, and support during consultative deliberations with key stakeholders. Their personal commitment demonstrates the Commission's dedication to ensuring inclusive electoral processes in Pakistan.

We are particularly indebted to Mr. Omer Hamid Khan, Secretary ECP, for his invaluable institutional support, vision, and personal commitment to gender and inclusion. His guidance played a crucial role in assisting the GSI Wing throughout the formulation of the GMSIF.

Additionally, we extend our gratitude to parliamentarians, key government departments, National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), and other stakeholders who devoted their precious time to attending consultative meetings and providing invaluable inputs.

ECP is grateful to the members of the Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group (GDEWG), which comprises civil society organizations representing persons with disabilities, transgender persons, minorities, and rural women. Their shared experiences and recommendations have guided the key strategic actions proposed in this document. Without their consistent and generous support, this document would not have been possible.

I am grateful to the GSI team deputed at ECP secretariat and provincial offices for their support in drafting the GMSIF.

Finally, we are thankful to our development partner, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and its team for providing technical assistance throughout the process of formulation of this Framework.

# Consultative Dialogue on ECP's **Gender Mainstreaming & Social Inclusion Framework**

with Gender and Disability  
Electoral Working Group

June 01, 2024



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## 1. Introduction

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is committed to ensure that Pakistan's electoral process is inclusive and accessible to all citizens. ECP's Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework (GMSIF) seeks to put this commitment into action. It is rooted in international human rights commitments and, recognizing that Pakistan's democracy is strengthened by the full participation of its diverse citizenry, seeks to address the barriers that women, minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender persons face in their electoral participation. The mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion in institutional and electoral processes is a critical commitment of ECP that has been reiterated in electoral laws, ECP's programs, policies and all its previous strategic plans. The recent Strategic Plan 2019-2023 had a dedicated pillar and specific actions under each of the priority areas of the Strategic Plan to ensure inclusion of women, religious minorities, people with disabilities and transgender persons.

GMSIF identifies practical actions that can be taken to ensure that gender and inclusion is mainstreamed across all ECP's programs, policies, legal framework and its functions. Proposed interventions respond to the need to promote gender equality and social inclusion both within ECP internally, as well as in the electoral process more broadly. Through this framework, ECP identifies and commits to meet both persistent as well as emerging challenges in Pakistan's electoral process, including:

- Addressing the gender and inclusion gap on the voter lists through consistent efforts to ensure that women, and historically marginalized groups including minorities, transgender persons and persons with disabilities, are aware of their rights to enroll and vote in elections.
- Fostering a more respectful and inclusive work environment within ECP to encourage both men and women staff, by developing and providing gender and inclusive sensitization training and guidelines for all ECP staff and by strengthening the workplace safety policy that prevents harassment.
- Promoting inclusion in all election administration activities by engaging women, civil society organizations working for women, persons with disabilities and other groups as partners in the development of voter and civic education outreach strategies as well as designing of targeted voter education to ensure that messages reach all citizens.

- Providing conducive environment at the polling stations for all the voters, particularly senior citizens, persons with disabilities, expecting mothers and women with infants. Through these interventions, in addition to others provided in the GMSIF, ECP seeks to mainstream gender and social inclusion in all stages of electoral processes.

To fulfill the commitments provided in the GMSIF, ECP will also establish regular monitoring of the GMSIF implementation plan.

It is important to note that the GMSIF development process drew on considerable research and literature available regarding best practices and standards for inclusive electoral processes, the Training Needs Assessment (TNA) of female staff carried out by ECP, official documents particularly gender and women empowerment policies adopted by the provincial governments<sup>1</sup>, recommendations from the reports of domestic as well as international Election Observation Missions and ECP's post-election review reports. In addition to this, the GMSIF also drew on recommendations made by Gender and Disability Electoral Working Groups (GDEWG), parliamentarians as well as feedback of other relevant stakeholders who were consulted during the GMSIF's formulation process. Under the overall supervision of the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner and guidance by the Secretary Election Commission, the GMSIF development process was led by the GSI Wing of ECP, in close consultation with internal and external stakeholders.



<sup>1</sup>Women Empowerment Package Punjab, Gender and Women's Empowerment Policy (2020-2024) Balochistan, Women's Empowerment Policy by Sindh Commission on the Status of Women and Women Empowerment Policy, KP

## 2. Legal framework and Electoral Context

### 2.1 Pakistan's International and National Legal Framework Relevant to Gender and Social Inclusion

Pakistan has shown its commitment to promoting gender equality and social inclusion through adherence to international covenants, treaties, conventions and the formulation of national laws, policies, and programs aimed at reducing gender disparity. These efforts seek to integrate women and other marginalized groups into national development agendas, emphasizing inclusive electoral and political processes.

**International Commitments:** Pakistan is signatory to several international legal instruments that guarantee equal rights to electoral and political participation for women and marginalized groups. These international legal instruments include the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Article 21)**; the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** which, Pakistan ratified in 2010, recognizing the universal right to vote and to take part in government without discrimination under Article 25; and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, which makes it binding on the state parties to ensure that women have a right to vote and hold public offices, and prohibits any kind of discrimination against women and girls.

Pakistan has also committed to ensure the rights of specific groups of vulnerable and marginalized people, for example through the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICEARD)**, and the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** that prohibits all forms of discrimination based on race or disability. In addition to these international conventions, Pakistan has also adopted the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include a commitment to “provide legal identity for all” by 2030 (16.9), as well as committing to ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. (5.5).

**Constitutional Framework:** At the national level, Pakistan has adopted numerous laws based on principles of equality. Most notably, the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the fundamental rights of all its citizens.

Article 25, for example, establishes that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law (25:1), and states that there shall be no discrimination based on sex (25:2). The Constitution also calls for promotion of women's electoral representation at the local government level (Article 32), and for steps to be taken to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life (Article 34).

Beyond gender-specific provisions, Articles 20, 21, 22 and 36 provide for professing any religion and safeguard against discrimination based on religion. Article 51(4) of the Constitution reserves ten national assembly seats for women and minorities and Article 106 also guarantees reserved seats for women and Non-Muslims in all Provincial Assemblies.

**Legal framework:** Complementing the Constitution, Pakistan has also recently adopted **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Acts** at the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and all provinces except Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which includes rights to access legal documentation. These Acts prohibit discrimination or exclusion of anyone based on his/her disability and promote the rights of people with disabilities to participate fully in the political process – as voters as well as elected leaders. For ECP, the passage of the **Elections Act in 2017**<sup>2</sup> resulted in increased attention to the electoral and political participation of women and marginalized groups at the national and provincial level. Key protections include:

- **Section 9:** Empowers ECP to declare a poll void if turnout of women voters is less than 10% of the total votes polled in a constituency. In such cases, ECP may declare the results void at either a single polling station or the entire constituency and authorize a re-poll.
- **Section 12C:** Mandates that ECP implements training and public awareness programs about the importance of universal voter registration and electoral participation – especially for women - as well as disseminate information regarding voting procedures and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

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<sup>2</sup>Available at the Website of Election Commission of Pakistan <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/>



- **Section 47:** Requires ECP to publish disaggregated data annually on the number of registered men and women voters in each National Assembly and Provincial Assembly constituency highlighting the difference in number of registered men and women voters. Where the variation in the disaggregated data is more than 10% in a constituency, ECP is authorized to take special measures to reduce such variation, including working with NADRA to expedite the issuance of NICs to women in the constituencies where such gap exists, as well as adding these women to the electoral rolls.
- **Section 48:** Mandates that ECP takes special measures for registration of non-Muslims, persons with disabilities and transgender persons in the electoral rolls as voters. Measures outlined under sub-section 1 of Section 48 include coordinated action with NADRA to expedite the issuance of NICs to these target groups.
- **Section:84 (9):** allows where a voter is blind or is otherwise so incapacitated that he/she cannot vote without the assistance of a companion, the Presiding Officer shall allow him/her such assistance.
- **Section 91:** requires the Presiding Officer to prepare a gender disaggregated statement of voters showing total number of men and women voters at the polling station and the total votes cast by men and women voters.
- **Section 93:** allows a person with any physical disability who is unable to travel and holds an NIC with a logo for physical disability issued by the NADRA to cast vote through the postal ballot.
- **Section 104 (1):** — requires for the purpose of election to seats reserved for women and non-Muslims in an Assembly, the political parties contesting election for such seats shall, within the period fixed by the Commission for submission of nomination papers, file separate lists of their candidates in order of priority for seats reserved for women and non-Muslims with the Commission or, as it may direct, with the Provincial Election Commissioner or other authorized officer of the Commission, who shall forthwith cause such lists to be published for information of the public: Provided that the list submitted by a political party shall not be subject to change or alteration either in the order of priority or through addition of new names in the list or omission of any name after expiry of the date of submission of nomination papers.

- **Section 170 (vii):** (vii): Penalizes a person who is guilty of exercising undue influence and prevents any woman from contesting an election or exercising her right to vote.
- **Section 203:** Requires political parties to encourage women to become its members.
- **Section 206:** Requires political parties to ensure at least five percent representation of women candidates on general seats.
- **Section 226:** The Commission shall organize and conduct the election to the seats reserved for women, peasants or workers, technocrats, youth and non-Muslims in a local government under the applicable local government law.



## **2.2 Strengths and gaps in systems and practices of the Election Commission**

### **2.2.1) Strengths of the Commission**

The Elections Act 2017 and ECP's Strategic Plan provide a foundation for ECP's gender and inclusion efforts. ECP's constitutional mandate is to hold elections honestly, justly and fairly. Central to this mandate is the need to ensure the equal rights of all the people to register as voters, vote for a candidate of their choice, and contest as candidates without any discrimination. The Elections Act 2017 marks a significant step forward in strengthening the legal framework for elections in Pakistan and ensuring compliance with international principles for credible and legitimate elections enshrined in international covenants and treaties to which Pakistan is a signatory. Drawing on this mandate, efforts over the last decade have been made to integrate gender and inclusion into ECP's Strategic Plans, addressing challenges faced by women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons in electoral processes.

Building on a strong legal foundation and addressing challenges identified by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), election observers, and media, ECP has implemented measures to promote gender and social inclusion in elections.

Affirmative actions include establishing a Gender and Social Inclusion Wing, collecting gender-disaggregated voters data, making polling stations accessible, forming the Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group (GDEWG) to work in coordination with the CSOs, adopting an inclusive Civic and Voter Education Strategy, conducting gender sensitization trainings for ECP staff and setting up inquiry committees for workplace harassment in compliance with the "Protection Against Harassment of Women at Work Place Act 2010" for creating a safer work environment for women, among others.

In General Elections 2024, ECP took significant steps in reaching out to women and voters from the most marginalized communities through inclusive civic and voter education campaign. ECP's Gender and Inclusion Desks for receiving complaints with accessibility features specially catered to the needs of hearing and speech impaired persons. The ECP also introduced a gender-responsive budgeting process for the first time to ensure budget planning processes reflect gender and inclusion priorities.

The most significant progress made was narrowing the persistent gender gap on electoral rolls from over 12 million women (11.7%) in the General Elections 2018 to 9.9 million (7.6%) in the General Elections 2024. This achievement was the result of ongoing, focused, and coordinated efforts with CSOs, NADRA, and other key stakeholders.

### 2.2.2) Gaps and Opportunities for improvement in Electoral Processes

Despite notable progress in enhancing participation of women and the marginalized groups in the electoral processes, some internal and external challenges persist such as gender gap on the electoral roll, less representation of female electoral officials and lower women voter turnout in comparison to men. Many of these challenges exist due to complex social-political, cultural and economic issues women face, which pose risks for their full electoral participation. However, these challenges present an important opportunity for resolution, given the legal guarantees in the Elections Act 2017 and the Commission's commitment to addressing these issues systematically to ensure inclusive and fair elections. In addressing these issues, ECP requires to build collaborations with other key stakeholders, including government departments, political parties, NADRA, CSOs and development partners.

**Persistent Gender Gap on Electoral Rolls:** Despite concerted efforts by ECP and improvements in electoral rolls, a gender gap remains an issue in voter registration. This gap was reduced from 12.4 million (11.7%) in the General Elections 2018 to 9.9 million (7.6%) in the General Elections 2024.

However, further efforts are required to bridge this gap as this gender gap undermines women's right to choose representatives and reduces their influence in electoral outcomes. Studies by ECP and the development organizations<sup>3</sup> suggest that major barriers to obtaining the NIC, which is a pre-requisite for voter registration, include a lack of awareness about the importance of the NIC, complex registration processes, distances to NADRA registration centers, cultural and mobility constraints, making it difficult for women, especially in rural areas, to register.<sup>4</sup>

**Low Women voters turnout:** The lower women voter turnout as compared to men is another important challenge that requires efforts at multiple fronts. According to conservative estimates, women voter turnout remains low even though 2.3 million more women voted in General Elections 2024 as compared to General Elections 2018<sup>5</sup>. While efforts have targeted rural areas to address the gender gap in women's voter turnout, the gap in metropolitan cities is also a matter of concern. The population of Pakistan's major cities has increased significantly from 1998 to 2023<sup>6</sup>, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions in these areas.

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<sup>3</sup> IFES

<sup>4</sup>Pilot Project Study to Identify Challenges in

<sup>5</sup>FAFEN Report on voter turnout in 2024 General Election

<sup>6</sup>Source: PBS 7th Digital Population Survey, 2023

In addition to gender gap on electoral rolls, cultural and social barriers, like the need for a male escort, domestic responsibilities and high travel costs to polling stations, remains a challenge. To overcome these challenges, ECP, besides working with CSOs, academia, and other key stakeholders, also engages with political parties. These parties have a critical role in directly engaging with women and raising awareness to encourage marginalized communities to take an active part in the electoral process.

**Low Representation of Women as Candidates in Elections:** Women in Pakistan are generally underrepresented in the Parliament. In General Election 2024, more women submitted nomination papers compared to General Elections 2018, with a total of 882 participants: 312 for the National Assembly and 570 for the four Provincial Assemblies. For the first time in the history, four transgender persons also submitted their nomination papers. In ICT, 27 women submitted papers, but due to different legal reasons including insufficient documents, lack of awareness in filling the forms, incomplete nomination forms etc, 7 were rejected, leaving 18 to contest. Same was the case in Punjab, where 254 women submitted papers, with 66 rejected.

In Sindh, 107 women submitted papers, with 11 rejections, leaving 96 accepted. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 38 women submitted papers, with 3 rejections and in Balochistan as few as 19 submitted papers with 1 rejection<sup>7</sup>.

Although the number of women who won general seats remained lower than men, the General Elections 2024 and its bye-election saw an improvement, with twelve women winning seats in the National Assembly compared to nine in GE 2018. Key challenges women generally face in their participation as candidates include a lack of voice within their political parties, a lack of information about the electoral and nomination processes. Additionally, financial, social, and mobility issues pose challenges to their ability to effectively campaign and mobilize their voter base.

**Lower Women Representation in ECP's Workforce:** ECP is mandated to ensure the recruitment of a minimum of 10% women within its internal workforce. ECP has recently made consistent efforts to bolster women's representation as employees. These efforts have resulted in a significant increase in women employees since 2020, with the number of women rising from 97 in 2020 to 177 in 2024.

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<sup>7</sup>Source: ECP

This includes 19 women in senior-level positions (grade 18 and above), 28 in grade 17, and 130 in grade 16 or below. One senior-level position is the Additional Director General (BS-20) who heads the Gender and Social Inclusion Wing. Efforts are needed to include more women at all levels of ECP, particularly in policy formulation and decision-making roles. A Training Needs Assessment (TNA) conducted for women employees by ECP in July 2020 revealed the need for training opportunities to expand skillsets and professional competencies, and for improved office facilities such as daycare, common rooms, and transportation. Respondents also highlighted the need for training all the staff at ECP to improve gender sensitivity within the organization. ECP has implemented various measures to address these concerns and further efforts are essential to create a safe and supportive environment for women.

**Challenges of Women Electoral Officials:** Another challenge that ECP faces is the lower number of women serving as temporary electoral officials as compared to men. This shortage necessitates deploying male election staff in tribal and remote areas where female staff are unavailable. For instance, the gap between men and women electoral officials during the GE- 2024 was 103,772(516,258 men compared to 412,486 women)<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, ECP is cognizant of the fact that facilities at some polling stations need further improvement, such as the provision of clean drinking water, security for women staff, and addressing the concerns about late work hours on Election Day, particularly women with child care responsibilities. This will require a few concrete steps, including integrating gender analysis into security planning, to encourage more women to join as electoral officials and to ensure inclusive elections. Necessary measures include providing designated washrooms and implementing effective transportation and security mechanisms at polling stations.

**Persons with Disabilities, Minorities and Transgender Persons:** The full inclusion of persons with disabilities, minorities, and transgender persons in electoral processes is a significant challenge for the Commission. According to the 2023 digital census, 3.10% of the total population of Pakistan has some kind of disability, (3.30 Male, 2.88 Female).<sup>9</sup> Only 474,580,165 people with disabilities are registered to vote, which is a small fraction of the total population. Out of which 130,265 are women and 344,315<sup>10</sup>. Voters with disabilities face challenges in casting ballots, despite ECP's efforts to facilitate them through postal ballot facility as provided in the Elections Act 2017, provision of ramps at polling stations, and voter information in braille.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: ECP

<sup>9</sup> 7th Population Census Report, PBS

<sup>10</sup>ECP Electoral Roll [https://ecp.gov.pk/storage/files/2/GSI/ECP%20Factsheet%20\(2\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://ecp.gov.pk/storage/files/2/GSI/ECP%20Factsheet%20(2)%20(1).pdf)



Persistent issues include a complex Special National Identity Card (SNIC) registration process, challenges with implementation of postal ballot system, and inadequate accessibility at polling stations given the phenomenal number of the polling stations set up at far flung areas at public and private schools.

The transgender community in Pakistan also faces significant exclusion and discrimination. The Constitution and Elections Act 2017 ensures the right to vote for all, including transgender persons. According to the 2023 digital census, the total population of transgender is 20,331. The highest number of transgender population is reported in Punjab, while the lowest is in KP<sup>11</sup>. ECP's Electoral Rolls 2024 show 3084 registered transgender voters. Despite reforms, they face difficulties in obtaining NICs with "X" category due to tedious registration process and lack of awareness about registration and voting processes.



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<sup>11</sup>7th Population Census Report, PBS

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees political inclusion of minorities by reserving quotas in Parliament and Provincial Assemblies. Articles 51(4) and 106 reserve seats for minorities in the National and Provincial Assemblies respectively. The Elections Act, 2017 mandates special measures for enrolling non-Muslims and prioritizes related activities. However, the lack of disaggregated data on minority women voters and candidates and their underrepresentation in assemblies, where men from minority often fill reserved seats, remains a challenge.



### 3. Rationale for Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework (GMSIF)

ECP recognizes that women's full and meaningful participation is crucial for strengthening democracy. Women constitute nearly half of Pakistan's population, and the full realization of democracy is contingent on their active engagement in the electoral process. However, due to complex socio-political, economic and cultural factors, despite significant electoral reforms and increased women voters' registration, still approximately 9.9 million women are missing from the electoral rolls and face significant barriers in contesting elections. Additionally, marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, minorities, and transgender persons are also significantly underrepresented and face challenges in participating in the electoral process, whether as voters, poll workers, candidates, or elected representatives.

ECP is constitutionally mandated to conduct elections honestly, justly, fairly, and in accordance with the law - a commitment reinforced by the 20th Constitutional amendment under Articles 218<sup>12</sup>. To fulfill this mandate, ECP has taken several measures outlined in the above Section and ensured that its policy and program documents such as ECP's five years Strategic Plans, Civic and Voter Education Plan adopted in 2024 and others have a focus on inclusive electoral process, encouraging participation of women, transgender persons, persons with disabilities, and minorities. In addition to these measures, at the institutional level, efforts are being made to ensure a secure and conducive work environment for women and excluded groups and to promote gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in election administration and processes.

Given that Pakistan is the fourth largest democracy, with the number of registered voters growing from 105.9 million in General Elections 2018 to 130 million in the General Election 2024, ECP faces challenges in addressing the diverse needs of women, persons with disabilities, transgender persons, and minority groups. Addressing these challenges remains an important commitment for ECP. To systematically deliver on this commitment, the aim of GMSIF is to provide a clear roadmap to assist ECP's efforts in promoting democratic values within the organization and in its work with the constituents. This framework will also inform ECP's 4th Strategic Plan to ensure that gender and social inclusion are mainstreamed across all institutional and electoral processes.

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<sup>12</sup> Constitution of Pakistan



## 4. Guiding Principles

The GMSIF is guided by the core values and principles of ECP, which includes.

- Independence and Impartiality
- Integrity and Accountability
- Efficiency
- Transparency
- Inclusiveness
- Service-mindedness
- Professionalism

## 5. Goal of the GMSIF

Aligned with the overall mandate of ECP, the goal of the GMSIF is to strengthen a fair, inclusive and just electoral process by ensuring the full, equal, and active participation of women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons at every stage.

## 6. Objectives of the GMSIF

The key objectives of GMSIF include:

- **Election operations and processes proactively integrate measures** needed to achieve inclusive and equal participation of women and marginalized groups including minorities, persons with disabilities with particular focus on women with disabilities and transgender persons. Social inclusion is effectively promoted both within the institution as well as in electoral processes by ECP.
- **Social inclusion is effectively promoted both within the institution** as well as in electoral processes by ECP.
- **Effective collaborations are built with key stakeholders** from diverse sectors, including civil society organizations, media, political parties and the public and private sector representatives, to achieve sustainable inclusive electoral outcomes.

## 7. Strategic Priority Areas & Strategic Outputs/Results of GMSIF

To achieve these objectives, the GMSIF identifies four key strategic areas/outputs crucial to mainstreaming gender and social inclusion, bolstering ECP's efforts towards inclusive electoral processes.

*Strategic Framework Priority Area 1: Maximize the participation of women, persons with disabilities, minorities and transgender persons in all stages of election operations and administration*

### Strategic output/Result 1.1

*Human and technical capacity of the GSI Wing is strengthened at the Secretariat as well as provincial levels to provide gender and inclusion perspective during all the stages of the election processes and resource planning*

- Appoint gender focal points in all provincial offices with strong mandates to coordinate effectively with ECP's district offices.
- Engage gender focal points at all levels of election planning, including (but not limited to):
  - ▶ contributions to and review of training content of ECP's training material, including training material for trainings of electoral officials and for orientation of newly recruited staff at ECP
  - ▶ development and review of election-related codes of conduct
  - ▶ inputs into voter education outreach strategies, mass awareness messages and during development of different products for voter education
  - ▶ In planning of activities for all the stages of elections such as appointment of electoral officials; provision of facilities at the polling station; assessing accessibility of polling stations and others.
- Represent in hiring panels, provide inputs in the recruitment processes such as job-description, advertisements of different vacancies, interview questions to assess the understanding and capabilities on gender and inclusion issues.

Introduce and enhance ECP's capacity in developing gender-responsive and inclusive budget planning processes.

Allocate a sufficient annual budget with designated staff to the GSI Wing to accomplish commitments laid out in the GMSIF.

## **Strategic output/Result:1.2**

### ***Polling stations are equipped and upgraded with improved facilities and safety measures instituted from a gender and inclusion perspective***

- Identify risks and challenges prior to the elections by conducting security assessments of polling stations. Integrate gender perspective to the security assessments to provide enhanced security at women polling stations. Provide awareness raising about women's electoral security needs as part of trainings of electoral officials.
- Sensitize both male and female electoral officials in dealing with voters with disabilities, elderly voters, expecting mothers and transgender voters with respect and dignity to facilitate them in exercising their democratic right.
- Ensure preferential voting is implemented for expecting mothers, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, particularly women and transgender persons.
- Equip and update polling stations with improved facilities of washrooms, drinking water, and ventilated rooms

## **Strategic output/Result 1.3**

### ***Safe and accessible polling stations established with reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities***

- Conduct safety and accessibility assessments of the polling stations in line with international standards leveraging technology to ensure that polling stations are accessible with quality ramps and accessible bathrooms.
- Mobilize resources engaging relevant public or private sector departments such as education department or inviting public and private partnerships to build and upgrade accessible polling stations.
- Prepare checklists for Electoral Officials to ensure integration of accessibility measures at polling stations on a poll day. Examples include placing of voting instructions and procedures with sign language, ensuring sufficient space for movement of wheelchair voters at the polling stations, allowing them accessibility, catering to their need for mobility. Include this information in voter education and awareness campaigns.
- Ensure that polling stations have braille posters with sign language using the internationally recognized symbol for disability to encourage participation and to guide and assist voters with disabilities.



## **Strategic output/Result 1.4**

*Women and marginalized groups are encouraged to engage as candidates and elected leaders*

- Address intimidation, hate speech and disinformation against women and the marginalized segments of the society in elections – especially threats of violence through different media platforms. Plan interventions such as monitoring and reporting hate speech through Election Monitoring Control Cells, preparation of gender sensitive codes of conduct for political parties and awareness on repercussions for engaging in such harmful rhetoric.
- Establish dedicated reporting channels for women and minority candidates facing harassment.
- Introduce electoral reforms to penalize political parties against non-compliance to Section 206, for allocation of 5% tickets to women on general seats.
- Engage with stakeholders such as Women Parliamentary Caucus to advocate for strict compliance to Section 203 of the Elections Act, 2017,
- Review and propose through a consultative process, gender sensitive amendments to the Elections Act 2017.

## **Strategic Framework Priority Area 2**

*Enhanced Voter Registration, Education and Awareness communication strategies*

### **Strategic output/Result 2.1**

*Persistent gender gap on electoral rolls is reduced and voter registration of women, persons with disabilities, minorities and transgender persons increased*

- Reduce the gender gap on electoral rolls by implementing sustainable inclusive NIC/voter registration campaigns with robust government ownership and improving coordination between ECP, NADRA, CSOs, local government representatives and relevant government departments.
- Urge NADRA to enhance its capacity and services in rural and remote areas for women, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons by increasing outreach through improved MRVs services, adding more women to the staff, introducing mobile units, providing gender and inclusion training for staff, and setting up more women's registration desks.

- Engage telecommunication companies to ensure that internet connectivity is improved at MRVs and NRCs in far-flung areas for universal coverage of Inclusive NIC/voter registration across all districts of the country.
- Advise concerned state departments such as Social Welfare Department, Health Department and NADRA, to simplify processes for persons with disabilities to obtain disability certificates and for issuance of SNIC with a disability logo by NADRA. Also, encourage one-window operations for disability certificate and registration of SNIC.
- Run regular public awareness campaigns about NIC registration in all national and local languages, accessible formats through electronic, print and social media and other relevant means. Additionally, design specific strategies tailored to reach rural women, persons with disabilities, transgender persons, and minority groups.
- Mobilize ECP's District Voter Education Committees (DVECs) to run community-based campaigns on the NIC and voter registration process in collaboration with CSOs.

## **Strategic output/Result 2.2**

### ***Voter turnout of women and marginalized groups enhanced in all elections including local government, by-elections and general elections***

- Regularly review, update and implement ECP's Inclusive Civic and Voter Education Plan (CVEP) in consultation with CSOs, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, transgender persons, minorities, DVECs, media and other key stakeholders.

Conduct regular gender and social inclusion sensitization workshops for media personnel, beat reporters and social media influencers on gender and inclusion to effectively implement CVEP.

Ensure all awareness and communication materials are in accessible formats, including easy-to-read, sign language and translation into local languages. Voter education materials to utilize a variety of information dissemination platforms to ensure access to a variety of groups (for example radio public service announcements (PSA), social media announcements, television with sign language interpretation, print and digital PSAs, or other interactive methods for population with low literacy rate.

- Ensure that all mainstream voter and civic education, and other ECP-related content consistently reflects the diversity of Pakistani citizens including women, people with disabilities, religious minorities, and transgender persons as poll workers, election officials, candidates and voters.
- Strengthen forums such as Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group and District Voter Education Committees through improved coordination with civil society organizations, academia, Commissions on Status of Women and Human Rights Commissions to strategize on enhancing voter turnout.
- Build synergies with academia and think tanks to conduct research on various issues related to low voter turnout of women and the marginalized segments of the society.
- Establish sub/thematic groups comprising organizations of persons with disabilities and transgender persons under GDEWG to ensure exclusive focus on their issues of participation and representation.
- Leverage technology for improved and efficient coordination and information sharing between the members of GDEWG, DVECs and ECP at the secretariat and provincial levels.
- Establish gender and social inclusion complaint desks as an integral part of ECP's complaint management system with accessible features such as WhatsApp calls using sign languages and other most feasible means at ECP Secretariat and at the offices of Provincial Election Commissioners.



### **Strategic Framework Priority Area 3**

#### ***Elections laws, rules and policies reviewed and modified with the gender and social inclusion lens***

##### **Strategic output/Result 3.1**

###### ***Election laws, rules and policies reviewed, and recommendations drafted for electoral reforms***

- Review the Elections Act 2017 and Election Rules 2017 based on lessons learned from the General Elections 2024 and recommendations from key stakeholders to propose legal reform legal concerning the voting rights of women, persons with disabilities, minorities, and transgender persons, aligning with Pakistan's international commitments.
- Engage gender and social inclusion experts for review of Elections Act 2017, relevant Election Rules and other policy planning processes. Ensure representation of the GSI wing in the Legal Framework Committee proceedings.
- Engage women parliamentarians, caucuses, commissions, and political parties in a consultative process to propose inclusive legal reforms, including improvements of the legal provisions related to women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.
- Revise nomination, scrutiny, and other processes to simplify them for women candidates and candidates from other marginalized groups.
- Conduct research and regularly track implementation of gender and social inclusion related legal provisions to identify gaps and propose recommendations.

##### **Strategic output/Result 3.2**

###### ***Awareness created about the gender and inclusion related provisions of Elections Act 2017.***

- Design and implement robust awareness campaigns about existing legal provisions, policies, and rules that promote electoral participation of women and other marginalized groups in local, regional, and sign languages. Utilize electronic media and ECP's social media handles for public awareness.
- Ensure staff and stakeholders are updated on any new amendments to the electoral laws by widely circulating information through orientation sessions, internal communication channels, website and social media channels.

- Effectively engage GDEWG and DVECs to create mass awareness about legal provisions, utilizing their forums to enhance outreach at the grass root level communities.

#### **Strategic Framework Priority Area 4**

*Election Commission is strengthened as a gender sensitive and inclusive institution*

##### **Strategic output/Result 4.1**

*Women and marginalized groups representation and participation enhanced as ECP employees and polling staff*

- Ensure implementation of 10% quota for recruiting women through improved recruitment practices, thereby ensuring equal employment opportunities
- Ensure all job advertisements encourage female and other marginalized applicants to apply.
- Ensure implementation of employment quotas for minorities and persons with disabilities.
- Enhance women's representation in senior decision-making positions and at all forums to solicit their opinions and feedback on organizational policies and programs, especially those concerning women as ECP staff, marginalized voters and candidates.
- Increase the number of women as electoral officials to ensure their deployment at women's polling stations and booths, especially in more conservative areas, by providing enhanced security and incentives in the far-flung areas.

##### **Strategic output/Result 4.2**

*Management and leadership training systems strengthened to promote inclusivity*

- Develop a training plan based on periodic needs assessment done with the female staff of ECP.
- Promote gender equality in training, ensure that at least 35-40% of trainees and trainers/facilitators among ECP employees are women. Additionally, make gender and social inclusion sessions as integral part of all the training programs conducted at ECP.
- Offer professional management and leadership trainings to women employees for their professional development, with improved chances of promotion to next ranks.

- Conduct annual inclusion analysis of trainings to assess the extent to which women, persons with disabilities and minority staff of ECP availed equal learning opportunities.
- Develop and implement criteria for selecting participants for international studies and observation visits, prioritizing women, disadvantaged groups, and employees with disabilities.



### **Strategic output/Result 4.3**

#### ***Organizational culture fostered and promoted based on gender and social inclusivity, with equal opportunities for all***

- Continue and strengthen the practice of offering mandatory gender and inclusion sensitization sessions for all employees during induction and throughout their service, with periodic refreshers.
- Conduct annual review of progress on improvement in workplace with more equitable and enabling environment for women staff
- Improve and scale up gender-friendly policies/measures offered for women employees, such as flexible hours for expecting mothers, lactating mothers with family care duties based on their differentiated needs; upgraded daycare facilities, a dedicated prayer rooms, separate toilets, and transportation facilities across all ECP offices.
- Ensure zero tolerance policy for intimidation/harassment and any form of discrimination at workplace based on gender, disability or religion.
- Strengthen Inquiry Committees under the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 and ensure confidential reporting mechanisms. Provide regular awareness training for staff and display the code of conduct at a conspicuous place across all ECP offices in local and regional languages.
- Extend the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 to polling stations to protect election officials during elections, in accordance with the new amendment applying the law to all workplaces.

## 8. Collaboration with Key stakeholders

### a. Engagement with CSOs, political parties and Academia

ECP's GDEWG and DVECs form strong networks with CSOs across all districts. These networks are expected to support the implementation of GMSIF, focusing on increasing voter registration, inclusive voter awareness, and community-level mobilization efforts for women and marginalized groups.

Partnerships with academia, public and private universities and research institutes will be ensured to generate evidence on the electoral participation of women and marginalized groups. Additionally, engagement with political parties and relevant parliamentary committees on electoral reforms will promote gender mainstreaming in electoral processes. Efforts will also be made to forge linkages with the international universities and institutes to learn from best practices and research carried out on these issue.

### b. Engagement with Public Institutes and Autonomous Commissions

Engagement with NADRA and key government departments such as education, health, women development department and social welfare department is crucial for improving women's electoral participation. This includes NIC and voter registration and ensuring accessible and well-equipped polling stations from a gender and social inclusion perspective. Moreover, collaboration with public schools, colleges, and universities will be fostered instituting strong civic and voter education programs for young girls and their families.

Autonomous Commissions such as National and Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women and Human Rights Commission will also be important partners in promoting inclusive electoral participation of all groups.

### c. Engagement with Media

The media plays a significant role throughout the electoral cycle, shaping perceptions of electoral processes and raising awareness of political rights. Engagement with print and electronic media is integral for educating the public on various aspects of the electoral process. Additionally, vloggers, influencers, and social media platforms like Meta and others will be meaningfully engaged in achieving the objectives of GMSIF.

**d. International Platforms and Universities:** To learn from the best practices globally, partnerships with international universities, election management bodies, forums and organizations promoting gender responsive and inclusive electoral processes will be developed.





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## 9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Under the guidance of the Chief Election Commissioner and ECP's senior management, the GSI Wing will be primarily responsible for ensuring implementation of the GMSIF, in close coordination with other wings, departments, and provincial and district offices of ECP.

Aligned with the existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of ECP, the GSI Wing will prepare annual activity and implementation plans to monitor the implementation and achievement of GMSIF targets bi- annually. This will enable the generation of substantive progress reports for periodic review.

Key aspects of the monitoring and evaluation will include:

- Track gender mainstreaming across all programs and operational processes in terms of resource planning, gender-sensitive initiatives, and training to ensure adherence to the overall GMSIF direction.
- Evaluate risks and challenges to identify the strengths, and gaps based on findings to develop strong recommendations to be widely shared within ECP.
- Document best practices and success stories that enhance the participation of women and socially excluded groups in electoral processes as voters, candidates, and employees.



# Glossary

## Annex A

### Gender

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making.

### Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that people's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Equality means that the perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of women and men will be given equal weight in planning and decision-making, and representation of women by increasing balance and parity. Gender equality is not a 'women's issue' but should fully engage men as allies and involve them actively.

### Gender Mainstreaming

An approach to programming and policy making that considers both women's and men's experiences and needs during program/policy design, implementation and evaluation in order for men and women to benefit equally from organizational programs and policies.

### Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

### Gender Responsive Budget

Gender-responsive budgeting is a strategy that creates budgets that work for everyone. By considering and analyzing the unique and diverse needs of every person, gender-responsive budgets strive for a fair distribution of resources.

**“No nation can  
rise to the  
height of glory  
unless your  
women are  
side by side  
with you.”**

*Muhammad Ali Jinnah*