**Responses to gender-based violence**

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Gender is an immeasurable, complex and intersectional social reality in Pakistan, one that the state is still struggling to fully understand. Violence against women in the country is similar to a pandemic. Unfortunately, framing the status of women in this country is difficult because of inequality, education and legal systems, but also they restrict women from having rights immortalised on paper. Internal accountability becomes impossible due to a lack of realisation to change the concerned need against women’s violence, to be respected and cherished, which makes a strong case for a broadening of the social safety net.

A woman, who was raped after her car broke down, had been driving with her children on the motorway at night, was blamed for the rape. There was citizen outcry regarding this event but, in a demonstration of how ‘seriously’ those at the helm take crimes against women, it took the government virtually four months to transfer the police chief who blamed the victim. Pakistanis are sculpting ideas about the globe, and about the place of women in it. But still, respect for women is unconditional, and they are in the public arena by right, not because of the obstinacy and guiltiness of the men in this country. Without the provision of a judicial process supported by these principles, the environment that enables such violence against women to take place will continue. This country will remain unsafe for women, and gender-based violence will continue to be utterly underreported because victims do not want to risk being pilloried in the court of conventional wisdom.

[Buzdar visits Mayo Hospital to inquire after health of blast injured](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2022/buzdar-visits-mayo-hospital-to-inquire-after-health-of-blast-injured)

More significantly, the domestic violence bill first passed by the National Assembly in April 2021 was referred back after the government wanted the Council of Islamic Ideology to review. The bill forbids physical, mental, economic and verbal abuse against women. It also outlaws abandonment of women and divorce threats. The draft of the bill stipulates that anything which might lead to harassment should invoke legal action. It also outlaws beating or slapping the wife. But critics of the bill and the misogynist mindset of society favours torture and domestic abuse subject to women. On a national scale, the Benazir Income Support Programme under the Ehsaas framework approved the inclusion of all transgender persons in the Ehsaas Kafaalat programme. The first-ever public school for trans persons opened which included vocational skills that would help make the community financially independent. Moreover, the women’s Parliamentary Caucus shared that women parliamentarians remained at the forefront to support legislation in parliament to ensure the protection of children and ending gender-based violence. Various public and private educational institutes celebrated the International Women’s Day by holding awareness seminars and walks.

[Met Office predicts rain in Lahore for next three days](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2022/met-office-predicts-rain-in-lahore-for-next-three-days)

Later in the year, capital police launched a gender protection unit to help women and children victims of sexual harassment, rape and bonded labour. Further, well-trained female police staff were deployed at the desk. Medical staff, including a psychiatrist, will provide assistance to affected women and children. Prime Minister Imran Khan launched the ‘Ehsaas Savings Wallets’ pilot initiative for seven million poor women registered with the government as Kafaalat beneficiaries under its Ehsaas programme. For the first time, the poorest women in Pakistan would have the option to save their stipends to help their families climb out of poverty. The first landmark digital tool, the ‘National Gender Data Portal’ was developed, which will serve as a one-stop-shop repository for high-quality data and evidence from across the country including violence against women. The Pakistan Ulema Council also dedicated a day to highlight the importance of women’s rights and to condemn incidents of child molestation and harassment of women as per the teachings of Shariah. It was also decided that clerics and prayer leaders across the country should be urged to educate the public about how to treat women as per the Quran and Sunnah. It has also been observed that ‘as per constitutional requirement’ the Punjab Assembly has demanded the appointment of women as members to the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII).

[One killed, two injured in road mishap in Ahmedpur Sharqia](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2022/one-killed-two-injured-in-road-mishap-in-ahmedpur-sharqia)

A focused approach is needed to address the underlying cognitive dissonance in police practices. It is an undeniable fact that the police, as an implementing arm of state law, must stand on the side of vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, making the sustainable development goals work for women is possible by incorporating equitable representation of women in legislatures with full integration in the inclusive development. Likewise, increasing women’s participation in the local government elections is important.