



Sustainable Manufacturing and
Environmental Pollution

GESI Gap Analysis Review for the Leather Supply Chain of Pakistan

A Review

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DISCLAIMER

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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to assess gender equality and social inclusion within Pakistan's leather sector by identifying key barriers faced by women and marginalized groups. It analyses their current representation across different roles in the supply chain and highlights existing gaps. The report further proposes actionable recommendations to promote inclusive participation and sustainable growth through equitable policies and practices.

GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) Gap Analysis Review for the Leather Supply Chain of Pakistan

1 Introduction

The leather industry in Pakistan, a labour-intensive sector employing around 500,000 workers, plays a crucial role in the country's economy. Despite its significance, the industry faces substantial challenges related to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). Considering gender equality as the first step, it is important to understand that women are drastically underrepresented in the leather sector, comprising only about 1% of the workforce, particularly in technical and managerial roles. This review aims to highlight the barriers hindering greater women participation in the leather sector, such as limited training opportunities, labour rights violations, and outdated perceptions of the physical demands of tannery work. A consultation was conducted to gather the perspectives of women associated with the leather sector (see Annexure I). By addressing these gaps, the industry can unlock the potential of a more diverse and inclusive workforce, ultimately enhancing both productivity and sustainability.

2 Objectives

The objectives of this analysis are to:

- Examine the specific challenges and barriers preventing greater representation and participation of women and marginalized groups in the leather sector.
- Analyse the current state of gender and social inclusion within the leather supply chain, including representation in technical, managerial, and decision-making roles.
- Recommend measures to improve gender and social diversity in leadership roles, decision-making forums, and the workforce, while fostering long-term sustainability through inclusive practices and policies.

3 GESI Gap Analysis and Recommendations

Focus Area	Findings	Challenges	Recommendations
<i>Workforce Representation and Diversity</i>	The leather industry in Pakistan employs approximately 500,000 workers, mainly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, the workforce is significantly imbalanced in terms of gender. Women represent only around 1% of the total workforce, with some enterprises employing 10% or fewer¹ women in various roles. In regions like Kasur, none of the tanneries employ women. This highlights a considerable gender gap, especially in formal and technical roles.	Cultural norms and perceptions about the physical nature of tannery work.	Launch awareness campaigns to challenge perceptions about the physical demands of tannery work. Organize workshops to promote gender diversity in the workforce. Incentivize gender-balanced hiring practices through industry associations.
		Night shifts and deadlines that hinder women's participation due to societal restrictions.	
		Technological advancements in developed countries that have increased women's roles have not been fully realized in Pakistan.	
<i>Training and Capacity Building</i>		Lack of gender-sensitive vocational training programs that cater to the needs of women.	Collaborate with academia to develop gender-sensitive vocational training programs.

¹ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-islamabad/documents/publication/wcms_917120.pdf

	The industry faces a skills gap², which impacts productivity and the ability to meet international standards. Vocational training opportunities are limited, and existing curricula do not meet the industry's evolving needs. This disproportionately affects women, who have fewer opportunities for skill development and advancement.	Insufficient investment in upskilling women to take on technical and managerial roles.	Create mentorship programs for women in the leather sector. Offer women-focused workshops to build skills for technical and managerial roles.
		Minimal focus on creating gender-specific opportunities for advancement in technical roles.	
<i>Labour Rights and Working Conditions</i>	Previously labour rights violations in the leather industry have contributed to a decline in international demand for Pakistani leather products. Women's participation in the sector is further hampered by these issues, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of protections³. There are no specific policies or measures in place to ensure women labour rights, safety, or fair wages.	Unsafe working conditions that disproportionately affect women.	Conduct awareness sessions on creating gender-sensitive workplace policies.
		Lack of maternity leave, healthcare benefits, and safe working environments for female workers.	
		Lack of gender-inclusive policies to address harassment and discrimination.	

² https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-islamabad/documents/publication/wcms_917120.pdf

³ https://www.switch-asia.eu/site/assets/files/4160/facing_the_mirror_final_10_july-1.pdf

<i>Technological and Infrastructure Gaps</i>	The leather industry in Pakistan is characterized by outdated technology and infrastructure, which has also limited the inclusion of women in the workforce. In contrast to developed countries where technology has reduced the physical demands of certain tasks, Pakistan's leather sector still relies heavily on manual labour, which is perceived as unsuitable for women.	Limited adoption of technologies that can reduce the physicality of tannery work.	Educate tannery associations on how technological innovations can reduce labour costs, enhance safety, and make production processes more accessible to all genders, while promoting the adoption of cleaner, safer, and more efficient production methods.
		Technological improvements needed to create opportunities for women in operational and technical roles.	
<i>Representation in Decision-Making and Leadership</i>	Women are grossly underrepresented in leadership positions within the leather industry⁴. Women are not typically involved in decision-making roles or managerial positions, even in enterprises where they are employed in administrative functions.	Structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership roles.	Create networking opportunities for women to engage with industry leaders. Advocate for women's inclusion in industry leadership and decision-making roles.
		A lack of gender diversity in decision-making forums and committees within the industry.	

⁴ <https://internationalleathermaker.com/women-are-an-undervalued-asset-in-the-leather-industry/>

4 Conclusion

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Gap Analysis underscores the pressing need for systemic change within Pakistan's leather sector. With women constituting a mere fraction of the workforce, particularly in technical, managerial, and decision-making roles, the industry is missing out on the benefits of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. Addressing these disparities is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic opportunity to enhance productivity, meet international standards, and foster sustainable growth.

The insights drawn from sector stakeholders and female professionals reveal that entrenched cultural norms, outdated infrastructure, lack of gender-sensitive training, and weak labour protections form critical barriers to inclusion. However, the analysis also highlights clear pathways for transformation, through targeted policy reforms, capacity building, technological innovation, and workplace safeguards that actively support women's entry and advancement in the leather industry.

By embracing gender-responsive practices and promoting an inclusive culture, the leather sector can reposition itself as a progressive, competitive, and socially responsible industry. Collective and sustained action from government bodies, industry associations, academic institutions, and civil society will be essential to bridge the GESI gaps and ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender or background, have equal opportunities to thrive within this vital economic sector.

Annex

Annexure I: Outcomes of Women Consultation

As part of our Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) efforts in the leather sector, a focused consultation was conducted with women professionals and students to understand the barriers and opportunities related to female participation in this traditionally male-dominated industry. The insights gathered are summarized below.

Name	Affiliation	Inputs
Eman Idrees	Masters Scholar, GC University Lahore	Female representation in the leather sector is extremely limited, I've yet to see a single woman representing this industry. It's time to establish a quota system, reserving positions for women and actively encouraging their participation. Alongside this, there must be flexible working arrangements and safe, supportive workplaces to truly welcome women into this field.
Mariam Liaqat	Punjab industrial Estates Development and Management Company	Female representation in the leather sector remains low due to barriers like gender inequality and insufficient support for working women. However, steps can be taken to boost women's participation by offering training and skill development programs, fostering community engagement through workshops and seminars, promoting gender equality, and implementing women-friendly workplace policies.
Fatima Rasheed	Forward Sports, Sialkot	Female representation in the technical lab sector, especially in leather, is still far too low. To change this, we need to offer scholarships and targeted training for women, establish mentorship programs, and highlight women's successes in the industry. Flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies are essential, along with promoting STEM education for young girls. We

		must also encourage women already in the field to share their experiences and mentor the next generation.
Hufsa Moonis Mir	Forward Sports, Sialkot	Gender disparity in the leather sector is clear, with men dominating technical and managerial roles. To bridge this gap, we need to offer women specialized education, highlight female role models, enforce equal opportunity policies, and ensure safer, more accommodating workplaces. Through mentorship and targeted support, we can foster greater gender diversity and inclusion in the industry, unlocking the valuable perspectives women bring.
Fareeha Sardar	Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design	Historically, the leather industry has been male dominated, with women holding just 1-2% of leadership positions in Pakistan compared to 20-30% globally. Women face challenges such as stereotypes, limited access to training, and work-life balance issues. To change this, we must focus on mentorship, training programs, networking opportunities, and promoting women-led businesses. Every small effort count, collective actions can lead to a more diverse and inclusive leather industry.

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