TOWARDS INCLUSION

ADDRESSING IMPLEMENTATION GAPS IN DISABILITY LAWS SINDH - 2025



A Study of Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center Data







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Introduction

Disability rights have become an increasingly important focus in global human rights discourse, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) serving as a cornerstone for advancing the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities (PWDs) worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability (WHO, 2011). In Pakistan, this translates to an estimated 12.8 million individuals, according to the most recent available data. According to available data, 79.36% of PWDs are physically disabled, 8.58% are mentally challenged, 6.77% are mute, and 5.28% are blind.² This diversity of needs requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach to policy formulation and implementation. Alarmingly, out of these, 69.89% of PWDs reside in rural areas, compared to 30.11% in urban centers- a disparity that exceeds the general rural-urban population split of 63.62% to 36.38%. This rural concentration of PWDs potentially exacerbates challenges related to equitable access to services, education, and employment opportunities thus preventing this vulnerable group from enjoying a meaningful life. As evident, the literacy rate among the PWDs population stands at a mere 31.6%, with 68.4% being illiterate,⁴ which is significantly lower than the national average illiteracy rate of 41.09%, highlighting the substantial educational barriers faced by PWDs. Moreover, the employment scenario is equally grim, with only 22.7% of PWDs employed and approximately 28.7% involved in housekeeping activities and unskilled labour.⁵ These grim figures, along with structural challenges, resource constraints, and inaccessibility, further marginalize PWDs. They prevent them from fully participating in society and leading a meaningful life, as guaranteed under the UNCRPD.

To protect and promote the rights of PWDs, Pakistan, as a signatory to the UNCRPD since 2011, has committed to aligning its national and provincial legislation with international standards. This commitment, coupled with the devolution of power through the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution in 2010, has shifted autonomy over disability affairs from the federal to provincial governments. Consequently, all four provinces of Pakistan embarked on the process of drafting new disability laws or amending existing ones to align with the UNCRPD principles to address local challenges. In Sindh, this legislative journey culminated in the enactment of the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 (Act 2018), which represents a significant

¹ Population with Disability: Census Year 2017. (2021). In Gallup Pakistan. Retrieved September 13, 2024, from https://gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GP-Big-Data-Census-2017-Vol-10-Population-with-Disability-1.pdf

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html

⁷ Adeney, K. (2012). A Step Towards Inclusive Federalism in Pakistan? The Politics of the 18th Amendment. Publius: The Journal of Federalism, 42(4), 539-565. https://academic.oup.com/publius/article-abstract/42/4/539/1863264

milestone in the province's efforts to protect and promote the rights of PWDs.⁸ The key provisions of the act are as follows:

Provision	Key Details
Recognition of Rights	Ensures dignity, equality, and participation for PWDs; prohibits discrimination and abuse.
Accessibility	Mandates accessible infrastructure, public facilities, and disability inclusion policies in organizations.
Education	Promotes inclusive education and provides for special education and support services.
Employment	Reserves 5% job quotas in public/private sectors; requires reasonable accommodations in workplaces.
Social Security	Offers pensions, vocational training, healthcare, and financial assistance for PWDs.
Health Services	Guarantees free physical and mental health services for PWDs.
Access to Justice	Establishes Special Courts and Legal Aid Centres for ensuring justice for PWDs.
Recreation & Public Services	Ensures access to recreational activities, public services, and transportation for PWDs.
Monitoring	Sets up a Sindh Disabilities Commission and Disability Fund to oversee implementation.
Penalties	Imposes fines, imprisonment, or community service for violations of PWDs' rights.

Table 1. Key Provisions of Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018

SLACC, a joint venture of the Government of Sindh and the Legal Aid Society (LAS), is a toll-free helpline (0800-70806). The Sindh High Court enrolled lawyers at SLACC provide free legal advice to callers, particularly across Sindh. These calls are recorded under the Customer relationship Management (CRM) system to be analyzed to assess the legal needs of the callers and gaps in law and the legal sphere. SLACC is instrumental for marginalized communities, including PWDs, as it offers expert legal guidance on family law, property rights, criminal matters, labor laws, and other legal issues. Since its establishment, SLACC has emerged as a valuable resource for understanding legal challenges faced by PWDs.⁹

⁸ Provincial Assembly of Sindh. (2018). Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018. Sindh Act No. XLVIII of 2018. Government of Sindh.

⁹ Sindh Legal Advisory Call Centre (SLACC). (2024). *Annual progress report (July 1st 2023 - June 30th 2024)*. Legal Aid Society.

This policy brief examines whether the enactment of the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018, has led to greater protection and progressive realization¹⁰ of the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs). While disability rights encompass a wide range of issues, this brief specifically focuses on the implementation challenges of the 2018 Act in Sindh and proposes actionable pathways to enhance the fulfillment of key rights. One of the major barriers to effective implementation is the lack of focused efforts and comprehensive data on PWDs in both Pakistan and Sindh. To address this gap, the analysis draws on two primary sources: queries received by the Sindh Legal Advisory Call Centre (SLACC) and insights from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders involved in advancing disability rights. Together, these sources provide a foundation for evaluating the current status of the law's implementation and formulating a comprehensive strategy to strengthen its impact.

Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed-method approach is utilized to identify the implementation gaps in disability laws within Sindh, Pakistan. Quantitative analysis is conducted of the data from the SLACC queries i.e., issues discussed by the caller with a SLACC lawyer) from the callers in Sindh, while qualitative analysis is based on KIIs with stakeholders working in the domain of disability rights and protections in Sindh. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques allow for a holistic understanding of the complexities surrounding disability rights and the challenges faced in their practical application.¹¹

SLACC Queries:

On average, SLACC receives approximately over 33,000 calls per year on diverse legal and non-legal issues, necessitating a thorough filtering process. The CRM system has maintained query records since 2014, including callers' demographic information, queries, and proposed solutions.

A total of 666 queries related to disability rights and issues from 2014–2024 were extracted, cleaned, and categorized from the Call Centre's CRM system. To identify relevant queries, a keyword-based methodology was used in the first stage. Keywords such as "disability," "disabled," "wheelchair," "deaf," "blind," and "mental illness" were applied to capture terms describing disabilities or conditions affecting PWDs or their caregivers. This process yielded around 3,000 queries, which were manually reviewed by the SLACC Team and the Research and

¹⁰ Progressive realization therefore allows States to take steps to the maximum possible extent in relation to their available resources. This does not mean that implementation can be delayed, however. It means that implementation can occur over time based on the available resources.

OHCHR. (n.d.). From Exclusion to Equality: Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/exclusion-equality-realizing-rights-persons

¹¹ Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

¹² Ibid

Development Unit (RDU) Team to remove irrelevant entries. Due to a high volume and complexity of mental health-related queries, these were excluded, resulting in a final dataset of 666 queries (22% of the total employment-related queries).

Once finalized, the dataset was categorized into three broad areas based on the nature of the legal issues raised by callers. This categorization allowed for a granular understanding of the challenges PWDs face across various domains and highlighted systemic gaps in public awareness, policy implementation, and service delivery, as evidenced by the nature and frequency of these queries.

Category	Description	No. of Queries
Public Law and Service Matters	Queries related to violation of constitutional rights, criminal offenses, employment, taxation, and administrative issues such as documentation, education, and public utilities.	253 (38%)
	Query example from this category: The caller stated that he is a person with a disability and was receiving Ushr/Zakat payments from the government. However, he has not received the amount for the past few months. He filed a complaint with the Deputy Commissioner (DC), but no action has been taken. He seeks legal advice on what to do next. ¹³	
Civil and Private Law	Questions concerning family law, property disputes, contract law, and torts such as negligence or injury. Query example from this category: He is a person with a disability. His father owns property, but his brother is in possession of the house. When he asked his father and brother for financial assistance or a share in the property, both refused. ¹⁴	109 (16%)

¹³ Sindh Legal Advisory Call Centre (SLACC), "Disability-Related Queries Data Analysis," 2014–2024, extracted from the SLACC CRM system.

¹⁴ Ibid

General Information and Knowledge	Questions about the basic information and guidance for legal rights, laws, and referrals for services like education, employment, financial aid (<i>Bait-ul-Maal</i>), or humanitarian relief.	304 (46%)
	Query example from this category: The caller stated that he is a person with a disability and has completed the 8th grade. He wants to secure a job under the disability quota and seeks guidance on the process. ¹⁵	

Table 2. SLACC Query Categories

This classification allowed for a **structured analysis** of the nature of disability-related queries received over the years, providing insight into the **legal challenges faced by PWDs** and the **gaps in existing policies and services**.

To deepen the analysis, queries were divided into pre- and post-2018 periods since the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in 2018, allowing us to assess any shift in callers' issues following its enactment. However, this revealed limited insights beyond a few callers specifically referencing the Act 2018 and the 5% employment quota.

Additionally, the dataset reveals significant gender and geographic disparities in access to legal aid services for PWDs. Across the decade, 88% of queries (583 out of 666) came from male callers, with only 83 from females. Geographically, Karachi accounted for 306 (46%) queries, reflecting greater awareness and service availability in urban centers, while rural areas like Sanghar

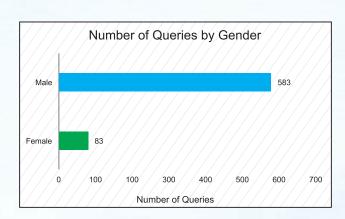


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of SLACC PWDs' queries

and Khairpur showed minimal engagement, signaling a lack of outreach and logistical barriers.

The data from SLACC, derived from legal aid calls spanning various categories, highlights the multifaceted legal issues faced by PWDs in Sindh, offering a glimpse into both systemic and personal challenges. The 666 queries captured over a decade were not uniformly about disabilities, but often intertwined with unique barriers that PWDs face due to their disabilities. For example,

¹⁵ Ibid

administrative challenges (29% of the reported public law and service matters) included instances where PWDs were denied financial support despite being

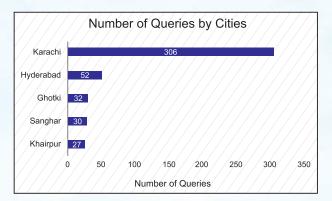


Figure 2. Top 5 cities of SLACC PWDs' queries

registered in programs like BISP or encountering dismissive attitudes at Zakat departments. One caller reported that despite being registered under the BISP program, he had not received financial support for months and was unsure of how to proceed.¹⁶

Employment-related calls underscored how PWDs faced discrimination even within the framework of disability quotas, such as qualified individuals being overlooked for jobs due to political interference or bureaucratic inertia. For instance, a caller with a BA qualification applied for a job through the disability quota, but after the Chief Secretary referred his case to the Deputy Commissioner South, no further action was taken. Another caller shared that his brother, who became disabled after sustaining workplace injuries at Mehran Sugar Mills, won a damages claim in labor court. However, when he attempted to rejoin the company under the disability quota, the management refused, and despite filing a complaint with the Labor Directorate, no action was taken.

Family and property law queries revealed the heightened vulnerability of PWDs, with callers unable to secure inheritance rights or financial assistance from family members, exacerbating their economic dependency. One caller reported that his father owned property, but his brother, who had possession of the house, refused to provide him with financial support or a share in the property.¹⁹

These legal challenges differ from those faced by the general public, as they stem from the systemic inaccessibility of public services and societal biases against PWDs. For instance, a caller reported at SLACC that he was unable to register his property because the biometric system was incompatible with his disability, as he had no hands or thumbs to complete the required

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

verification.²⁰ This highlights how even technological advancements can marginalize PWDs if not designed inclusively. Many issues discussed in the queries also indicate broader failures in implementing the Sindh Disability Act, such as delays in fulfilling the 5% employment quota and insufficient accessibility infrastructure.

To explore these gaps further, five in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders from the Social Welfare Department and civil society organizations. These interviews provided a supply-side perspective, revealing systemic challenges such as financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate public awareness, as well as potential solutions to bridge these gaps. The combination of quantitative data and qualitative insights offers a nuanced understanding of the unique legal challenges faced by PWDs, while also highlighting the barriers to the effective implementation of disability rights in Sindh.

Key Insights

Despite the Sindh PWD Act 2018 being comprehensive and progressive in protecting the rights of PWDs, the results from the research reveal that there is a disconnect between legislative achievements and practical outcomes is evident in Sindh. However, it is not unique to Sindh or Pakistan. Globally, the implementation of disability rights laws faces numerous obstacles, including inadequate funding, lack of awareness, societal stigma, and insufficient administrative capacity.²¹ In the context of Sindh, these challenges are compounded by structural issues such as limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which collectively undermine the realization of rights enshrined in both national legislation and the UNCRPD.²²

Lack of Awareness

There is a critical disconnect between Sindh's legislative framework for PWDs and its practical implementation, largely due to insufficient awareness among both government officials and the general public.²³ A key objective of the 2018 Act is to enhance research and awareness about disability rights, however, a significant awareness gap persists on both the supply side (government) and the demand side (public). On the demand side, SLACC data reveals significant gaps in access to information that directly affects PWDs. Of the 666 queries received, 304 (46%) were categorized under "General Information and Knowledge", this category included requests for basic information on legal rights, specific laws, and referrals, such as guidance on government programs, support mechanisms, and contact details for relevant services. For example, 46 inquiries sought information about employment opportunities, for example:

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Lord, J. E., Suozzi, D., & Taylor, A. L. (2010). Lessons from the Experience of U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Addressing the Democratic Deficit in Global Health Governance. The Journal of Law Medicine & Ethics, 38(3), 564–579. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-720x.2010.00512.x

²² Grech, S., Weber, J., & Rule, S. (2023). Intersecting Disability and poverty in the Global South: Barriers to the localization of the UNCRPD. Social Inclusion, 11(4). https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v11i4.7246
²³ SLACC_PWD_KII_01

- A caller stated, "I am a disabled person and 8th class qualified, I want to get a job on the disability quota. Please guide me."²⁴
- Another caller, a blind person, shared, "I have applied to the agriculture and revenue departments but all is in vain. Can you guide me?"²⁵
- A third caller said, "I am a disabled person, and I want legal help to secure a job under the disability quota." ²⁶

Another 39 inquiries pertained to financial support:

- One caller asked, "How much is the disability quota announced in government vacancies?"²⁷
- Another asked, "Can I apply for any government funds for disabled persons?" 28

These figures highlight a pressing need for consistent and reliable access to information regarding essential services and rights. Often, the public awareness efforts, if they are ever made, are event-based and lack continuity, limiting their effectiveness in fostering a sustained understanding of disability rights.²⁹ Research confirms that while awareness campaigns can temporarily improve understanding of disability issues, they require sustained, multi-faceted approaches to create meaningful and lasting changes in societal attitudes and behaviors.³⁰ The low engagement of female PWDs, comprising only 83 queries (as opposed to 583 queries of males) highlights compounded barriers such as cultural constraints and limited access to resources, even for obtaining basic information.

Lack of Implementation

Despite some awareness of available resources and services, PWDs' interactions with public institutions remain precarious. The "Public Law and Service Matters" category accounted for 253 queries, covering issues with government departments, documentation, and public services like utilities and pensions. The high volume of these queries indicates inefficiencies in public service delivery and a lack of accommodations for PWDs, highlighting the need for targeted reform and greater accountability. Again, within this category, employment-related queries make up a significant portion (115), revealing the challenges PWDs face in accessing job opportunities and understanding their employment rights. For example:

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ SLACC PWD KII 02

³⁰ Gómez-Marí, I., Sanz-Cervera, P., & Tárraga-Mínguez, R. (2021). Today is my Day: Analysis of the awareness campaigns' impact on functional diversity in the press, on Google, and on Twitter. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(15), 7789. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18157789

- One caller reported, "I applied for a job under the disability quota in 11 departments. I was qualified, but I was denied the job because others were given preference based on political influence."³¹
- Another shared, "I applied for a job under the disability quota in the education department, I was qualified, but still, I didn't get the job, and no one responded to my application."³²
- A caller who had been employed under the disability quota but was terminated in 2019 stated, "I was permanently employed but terminated from my job. Other disabled employees were reinstated, but I wasn't. I seek legal remedy." 3334

Many also cited discriminatory practices, such as rescinded job offers or ignored qualifications, often linked to political interference or corruption. Despite the Act 2018 mandating a 5% employment quota for PWDs across all sectors, these challenges persist.

The third major category, Civil and Private Law, includes queries primarily related to family law and property rights (50 and 44, respectively), highlighting issues such as inheritance, custody, divorce, and land disputes with no awareness and resources to resolve such matters. In such cases, despite awareness, the PWDs face various barriers from family or other institutions in accessing their rights³⁵. For example:

- A caller, who is a disabled person, reported, "My father owns property, but my brother has possession of it. I've asked my father and brother for financial assistance or property, but both have refused."³⁶
- Another caller stated, "I am a disabled person, and my father passed away in October 2023. There's an amount of Rs. 5 lac in my deceased father's account, but the bank officials are saying I need to apply to the court to get the money. What can I do?"³⁷

Female PWDs face additional marginalization due to gender and disability biases. Seeking justice through formal legal systems is often unfeasible, deterring PWDs from pursuing civil and private legal matters. Currently, there are no efforts to make formal or alternative justice systems

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ If the termination lacked due process or was discriminatory, this may constitute a violation of Section 9 of the *Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018*, which guarantees non-discrimination in employment and mandates equal treatment of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, if reinstatement was selectively applied, the principle of equality before law under Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan could also be implicated. Such instances highlight the urgent need for stronger grievance redressal mechanisms and legal enforcement under the Act.

³⁵ Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018, Sections on Education, Employment, and Access to Justice; SLACC PWD KII 01 and SLACC PWD KII 03, 2024)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

accessible, such as providing interpreters or sign language services and not to mention no efforts are being made to implement the special courts across Sindh as the Act 2018 mandates.³⁸

Lack of Resources Hindering Access and Inclusion

A major barrier to the effective implementation of disability rights is a lack of allocated funds for disability programs, which severely limits the ability to raise awareness, conduct outreach, and establish support services.³⁹ Often political challenges exacerbate resource allocation, with disability issues often deprioritized in favor of other government interests. Thus, this lack of funding results in delays or abandonment of critical activities, such as training government personnel, establishing accessible facilities, and expanding rehabilitation services.⁴⁰ Without increased funding and resource allocation, the existing disability laws would remain largely ineffective, as there is inadequate capacity to support their practical application.

In addition to this, infrastructure issues further hinder accessibility and inclusion. Public and private buildings fail to meet the accessibility standards outlined in legislation. Similarly, public institutions and transportation systems are largely non-inclusive. These gaps create daily challenges for PWDs in navigating public spaces, which further isolates PWDs from meaningful societal participation. These structural and systemic gaps stem from inadequate implementation of accessibility laws, including the Accessibility Code of Pakistan (2006), which mandates specific accessibility standards but remains largely ignored. Interestingly, no calls addressed this apparent issue, suggesting that awareness of infrastructure accessibility may not be recognized as a significant concern. Cumulatively, these barriers exclude PWDs from fully participating in economic affairs and society in a meaningful way.

Consequently, the economic impact of neglecting disability rights costs Pakistan between 4.9% and 6.3% of its GDP annually.⁴³ This economic loss stems from the exclusion of disabled individuals from the workforce and broader societal participation. Nevertheless, policy makers overlook issues due to lack of awareness, sensitization and poor allocation of resources.

³⁸ Although the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018 mandates the establishment of special courts for PWDs, during SLACC Research Team's visit to the district courts in Karachi, the administration confirmed that these courts have not yet been established (Observation, Visit to Karachi District Courts, May 2024).

³⁹ SLACC_PWD_KII_01 and SLACC_PWD_KII_04

⁴⁰ SLACC PWD KII 04

⁴¹ SLACC PWD KII 03 and SLACC PWD KII 01

⁴² The Accessibility Code of Pakistan (2006) sets guidelines for ensuring barrier-free access to public and private infrastructure for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). It mandates ramps, accessible washrooms, elevators, signage, and assistive facilities in buildings, transportation, and public spaces to promote inclusivity and mobility for PWDs. National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine. (2006). Accessibility Code of Pakistan. Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Government of Pakistan.

⁴³ British Council. (2014). Moving from the margins: Mainstreaming persons with disabilities in Pakistan. Research, Evaluation, Monitoring Unit (REMU). Retrieved from

https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/mainstreaming persons with disabilities 0.pdf

Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

While the Act is comprehensive in scope, there is currently no system to track its enforcement or measure its impact. For example, the legislation mandates a 5% disability quota for PWDs across Sindh, but there is no accountability regarding this.⁴⁴ A few organizations, such as ASHA, monitor their activities; however, these efforts are not part of a broader framework, resulting in the impact of disability policies remaining largely unmeasured.⁴⁵ This issue is particularly evident within the government, where there is an absence of government-led monitoring and evaluation systems or any long-term plan for the systematic and effective implementation of this Act.

For the progressive realization of rights, a monitoring and evaluation plan⁴⁶ is essential to ensure sustained, systematic efforts. It helps policymakers identify successes and areas for reform, ensuring consistent protection of PWDs' rights.

Way Forward and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of 666 queries received by SLACC and corroborated by KIIs, three areas stand out where targeted, systematic efforts in Sindh will most effectively improve the rights of PWDs and support the implementation of the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018.

These recommendations are primarily targeted at the Government of Sindh, particularly the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Social Welfare Department, Law Department, and Education and Health Departments, along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society actors, and private sector stakeholders involved in disability rights, service provision, and advocacy.

Enhance Awareness and Communication

A comprehensive multi-channel awareness campaign should be implemented to address the widespread information gap surrounding the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs). These campaigns should specifically focus on raising awareness about the rights guaranteed under the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018, including but not limited to the right to inclusive education, accessible healthcare, legal identity, accessibility in public spaces, and the 5% employment quota in both public and private sectors.

To support these awareness initiatives, standardized and accessible information packages should be developed that highlight key provisions of the Act. These materials must be available in Braille, audio formats, sign language, and easy-to-read pictorial guides for persons with intellectual disabilities. The campaign must also prioritize SMS messaging in local languages to effectively

⁴⁴ SLACC PWD KII 03

⁴⁵ SLACC PWD KII 05

⁴⁶ A robust M&E plan typically includes clear baselines, defined outcome indicators, periodic reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops to adapt strategies based on evidence and changing needs.

reach diverse populations across urban and rural areas. At SLACC, this approach has already shown success, with SMS messages accounting for more than 50% of incoming calls annually.⁴⁷

This digital outreach should be complemented by dynamic and engaging social media content that not only explains rights but also features real-life success stories of PWDs. Additionally, traditional media engagement through dedicated TV and radio programming, will help extend the campaign's reach to communities with limited access to digital platforms.

Simultaneously, community-based awareness sessions should be conducted in collaboration with local leaders including civil society representatives, religious leaders, educators, and local government officials. These leaders play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing communities, making them effective partners in establishing a grassroots understanding of disability rights. Research emphasizes the importance of providing learning materials in multiple accessible formats to enhance engagement and understanding across disability types.⁴⁸

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPD), Government of Sindh, should lead the design and rollout of this campaign in collaboration with the Information Department, relevant NGOs, and media partners. DEPD should also ensure proper monitoring mechanisms to assess the campaign's reach and impact.

Employment Portal and Implementation of 5% Quota

To advance economic opportunities for PWDs, a Special Employment Exchange and portal should be established, as mandated by the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018.⁴⁹ This platform, under the authority of the DEPD, will maintain a comprehensive database of both public and private sector employers. These employers will be required to provide information about vacancies earmarked for PWDs, as well as the current status of any such vacancies, including whether they have been filled or are about to open.

The system will be designed to track and verify compliance with the 5% employment quota for PWDs in both government and private sectors. The Sindh Labour Department, in collaboration with DEPD, will conduct regular audits to ensure that these employers are adhering to the law, providing much-needed transparency and accountability.

The portal should be publicly accessible, allowing PWDs to view available opportunities directly and apply for them, while also enabling civil society and oversight bodies to monitor compliance. Certain administrative features, such as employer reporting and quota tracking dashboards, may be restricted to relevant departments for quality control and data security. In addition to job listings, The platform should also include support services such as accessibility training, workplace accommodations etc for employers who hire PWDs, offering guidance and resources to help them

⁴⁷ Sindh Legal Advisory Call Centre (SLACC). (2024). *Annual progress report (July 1st 2023 - June 30th 2024)*. Legal Aid Society.

⁴⁸ Nganji, J. (2018). Supporting the information journey of students with disabilities through accessible learning materials. Information and Learning Sciences, 119(12), 721-732. https://doi.org/10.1108/ils-07-2018-0062

⁴⁹ Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018, Section 11(9), Sindh Act No. XLVIII of 2018.

manage and integrate PWDs into the workplace effectively. Research shows that with the right support, employers are more likely to hire PWDs, as it mitigates perceived risks and improves employment outcomes for this marginalized group.⁵⁰

To successfully implement this initiative, strong coordination will be required between various stakeholders, including DEPD, Sindh Labour Department, Sindh Information Science and Technology Department (SITD), Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP), employers, and organizations advocating for PWDs. This collaborative effort will ensure the platform's effectiveness in bridging gaps in employment opportunities and fostering a more inclusive workforce.

Implementation Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation

a) Leveraging Collaboration between Government and NGOs

Collaboration between NGOs and government entities plays a critical role in implementing and facilitating services such as education, employment, health, legal aid, and vocational training for PWDs. Since government departments often lack technical skills, insights and resources, private sector actors, including both corporate partners and civil society organizations, can fill the gap and assist the government in improving the eco-system of inclusive service delivery, rights protection, and employment opportunities for PWDs. Organizations like the Network of Organizations Working For People With Disabilities Pakistan (NOWPDP) have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with various entities, including NGOs providing free healthcare and legal assistance, to streamline services such as healthcare access and legal aid. NOWPDP has implemented several initiatives to support PWDs through collaborations with government institutions. Key partners include the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPD) and the Sindh Technical and Vocational Training Authority (STAVTA). For example, NADRA works with NOWPDP to expedite the issuance of specialized Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) for PWDs, aiming to reduce bureaucratic barriers. Meanwhile, DEPD and STAVTA support vocational training and certification processes, helping PWDs gain valuable skills for employment. Furthermore, government support for inclusive education has been evident in Sindh. There are public-private partnerships, such as Moriro Markaz,⁵¹ which benefit from the government's backing through infrastructure support and partial funding to foster inclusive educational environments. DEPD also actively advocates for implementing the 5% employment quota for PWDs in government roles, reflecting a targeted approach to promoting inclusivity in the workforce.⁵² The Pakistan Blind Association emphasized the importance of cooperation between

⁵⁰ Rodriguez, J. N., Marini, I., Chen, R. K., & Tanguma, J. (2019). An exploratory factor analysis: Factors influencing employers' disposition to hire and retain persons with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 52(1), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-191062

Nowpdp. (n.d.). NOWPDP - Leading disability organization in Pakistan. https://nowpdp.org.pk/projects
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government bodies and NGOs. Collaborative efforts, such as reopening closed schools in rural areas through Sindh's education department, are essential for creating accessible and inclusive education opportunities.

However, the effectiveness of these partnerships often depends on the competencies and knowledge of appointed government focal persons, which can sometimes present challenges such as a lack of awareness about disability laws, inadequate coordination, or limited authority to implement change. These insights underscore the potential of formalized collaborations between government entities and NGOs, leveraging both sectors' unique capabilities to address the multifaceted needs of PWDs effectively.

b) Institutional Capacity Building

To fill competency and capacity-related gaps, the Comprehensive Competency Framework⁵³ to be developed and executed by the DEPD, in collaboration with the Sindh Civil Services Academy, and supported by relevant NGOs and private sector entities, should be established by using a three-tiered approach to building institutional capacity. Each tier targets specific stakeholder groups: the Foundation Level is aimed at frontline government staff and community-based NGO workers; the Technical Level is meant for professionals in education, health, and corporate sectors; and the Leadership Level is designed for senior government officials, NGO directors, and corporate inclusion leads.

Tier	Focus Area	Key Competencies	Success Measurement
Foundation Level	Core Competencies	 Knowledge of disability rights legislation Inclusive service delivery principles Basic accessibility assessments Effective communication with PWDs 	 90% pass rate on disability rights knowledge tests Completion of accessibility assessment training
Technical Level	Specialized Skills	 Expertise in assistive technology Inclusive education methodologies Workplace accommodation assessments Disability-specific service delivery 	 Implementation of at least 3 assistive technology solutions Development of 5 workplace accommodation plans

 $^{^{53}\} MindTools\ |\ Home.\ (n.d.).\ \underline{https://www.mindtools.com/ad66dk2/developing-a-competency-framework}$

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Leadership Level	Strategic and Policy Development	 Strategic planning for inclusion Stakeholder management Policy development & implementation Advocacy & change management 	 Leading 2 major inclusion initiatives annually Development of comprehensive disability inclusion strategies
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c) Improve Data Collection and Monitoring

The lack of reliable data on the population of PWDs in Pakistan significantly impedes effective policy-making and service delivery. Moreover, compliance with disability quotas is often hindered by poor data on PWD employment rates. To address this, a Disability Data Collection Framework, introduced by the DEPD and implemented across all public sector departments, NGOs, and private sector entities engaging with PWDs, should be introduced to standardize reporting across service providers, improve data consistency, and enable real-time monitoring. This framework could include standardized data entry forms at the Union Council level, integration of disability identifiers into NADRA and Bureau of Statistics databases, and regular data audits conducted by DEPD. However, effective implementation may be challenged by limited data interoperability between NADRA, the Bureau of Statistics, and DEPD systems, stemming from differing data standards, siloed databases, and lack of shared protocols. Addressing these gaps through system integration, inter-agency coordination, and secure data-sharing agreements will be critical for ensuring data reliability and utility.

Insights from KIIs also emphasize on the importance of accurate data for implementing disability rights, as without comprehensive data, it can be challenging to assess PWDs' needs, allocate resources, or implement support services effectively. The interviews also pointed to significant gaps in current data collection methods, which lead to misinformed policy decisions and inadequate service delivery.⁵⁴ Therefore, the role of the Accessibility Monitor and Recovery Officer, responsible for ensuring that all government services for PWDs are accessible, overseeing public transport accessibility and fare concessions, addressing vehicle registration and duty exemptions for retrofitted vehicles, and facilitating the issuance of special plates and stickers, is crucial for ensuring data accuracy and enforcing accessibility standards, as designated under the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Rules 2021.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The policy brief underscores the urgent need for sustained efforts to bridge the gap between the legislative framework and the lived experiences of PWDs in Sindh. Despite the significance of the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, the impact of this legislation has been

⁵⁴ SLACC PWD KII 05

⁵⁵ Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2021. (2021). Sindh Government Gazette, Section 7(1).

constrained by challenges in implementation, including a lack of awareness about disability rights, insufficient accessibility in public spaces and economic participation, and inadequate monitoring systems to ensure compliance. These issues are further exacerbated by financial constraints, leaving many PWDs without the necessary support to fully engage in society.

Overcoming these obstacles requires an informed and collaborative approach to disability rights that involves government entities, NGOs, and the private sector. As immediate priorities, the establishment of a publicly accessible Employment Portal to track and enforce the 5% employment quota for PWDs, and the rollout of a Disability Data Collection Framework to standardize and integrate data across departments, should be pursued. These targeted interventions will help create a more inclusive workforce and inform evidence-based policies. Together with broader measures such as strengthening institutional competencies, launching awareness campaigns, and enhancing monitoring mechanisms; these steps can bring Sindh closer to realizing the inclusive vision outlined in its disability legislation, ensuring that PWDs can access opportunities and resources on equal footing

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