

The Role of Labor Laws in Protecting Workers' Rights in Pakistan

**Ali Hassan¹, Muhammad Dilawar Qureshi², Syed Muhammad Zain Ul Abideen³,
Kashif Lodhi⁴**

¹ School of Law and Policy, University of Management & Technology Lahore.

Email: charlie.nab@gmail.com

² Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan, CEO Dilawar Law Associates and Dilawar Institute for Quirky Educational Methods (DIQEM).

³ LLB (hons), University of London.

⁴ PhD Scholar in PhD school of ADMINISTRACIÓN, HACIENDA Y JUSTICIA EN EL ESTADO SOCIAL. Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Salamanca.37007 Salamanca.(Spain).

Email: kashifit86@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This research focuses on Pakistan's labor laws and their implementation to protect labors' rights. This legal and doctrinal approach describes how labor legislation preserves fundamental rights within Pakistan's legal framework. This includes legislation related to equitable pay, safe working environments, and protection measures for collective bargaining. The study measures how protective Pakistan's labor legislation is across all sectors. The study utilized a mixed-method approach. Quantitative data was collected using a survey conducted on 250 workers across the manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors. This was complemented by qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 experts on labor rights, government representatives, and trade union leaders. Methodological triangulation was also achieved through the analysis of core labor legislation, particularly the Industrial Relations Act of 2012, alongside provincial labor laws. The findings revealed stark differences between available legislation and the reality of workers' rights protection. While the analysis documented a significant gap, namely that 68% of workers had no knowledge of their rights and 72% described the enforcement of safety legislation as absent, the most significant risk is to workers in the informal sector. In Pakistan, approximately 73% of workers fall within this category and, as this study demonstrates, they have no legal protection. The study emphasized that Pakistan has comprehensive labor laws, yet due to weak implementation, these laws have little to no effect. Recommendations provided to improve the protection of workers' rights in Pakistan included the strengthening of the labor inspectorate, the provision of additional awareness campaigns geared towards workers, extending the coverage of laws to the informal economy, and escalating the severity of consequences that accompany laws violations.

Keywords: Labor Laws, Implementation, Workers' Rights, Fundamental Rights, Legal Framework, Pakistan.

Introduction

Labor laws are essential for social justice and economic equity in every nation. These laws help protect the dignity, safety, and welfare of the working class (Eichenhofer 2024). In Pakistan, the legislation concerning the working class must be strong. A large 72 million working Pakistanis are employed in several key sectors including agriculture, construction, manufacture, and services (Begum 2022). For

several decades, the country has drawn up extensive laws and built a legal framework regarding the protection of the workforce. Protection covers the enforcement of minimum wage, regulation of working hours, the social security acts and collective bargaining provisions, the health and safety laws acts. All these laws and provisions constitute the nation's commitment to upholding the international standards of the workforce. The country has, for example, signed international conventions of the International Labor Organization. The laws cited and extensive legal mechanisms built over the years, from the Industrial Relations Act 2012 to the various provincial labor laws, and the other laws, demonstrate Pakistan's commitment. However, a backward gap remains, i.e., legal provisions and the enforcement mechanisms drawn up are not being utilized to protect the working class (Saleem 2024). In Pakistan, numerous issues undercut the protection of workers' rights, making even the legal frameworks ineffective. Unaddressed historical issues, the lack of funding for labor departments, feeble enforcement, and informal employment relationships create conditions where labor rights are violated. This is perhaps more problematic in the informal economy about 73 percent of Pakistan's workforce is informal where workers lack any legal protection and are exposed to exploitation, unsafe conditions, and economic instability. The risks for women, children, and agricultural workers are even more severe because of the added social, cultural, and economic marginalization. The gap between the spirit of the law and its enforcement has led to widespread violations, including the refusal to pay legal minimum wages, excessive hours, lack of safety equipment, suppressed unionization, and access to social security (Azeem and Akbar 2022).

This study stems from the need to evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's labor legislation in protecting the rights of employees and to understand the underlying factors that limit enforcement. Although some scholarship has focused on particular facets of labor rights in Pakistan, there is still a gap in the integrated research that combines legal scholarship with first-hand accounts from workers and perspectives of other stakeholders in the labor rights arena. This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive account of the worker rights situation in Pakistan. It combines quantitative research conducted with workers in numerous industries with qualitative research conducted with labor rights advocates, state functionaries, and representatives of trade unions. Given Pakistan's economic situation and the impact of globalization on labor, the increase through social activism and civil society network on the awareness of workers' rights, the social compliance of the country to international labor laws to maintain preferential trade with Europe, and other countries, the research is of heuristic value.

The value of this work is not only in research but in its impact on potential changes in policies and in the advocacy for social equity. Attention must be given to the barriers that lie between the policies that need to be put in place and the policies already in place. This gap the research addresses can substantially be narrowed to improve the lives of numerous workers in Pakistan. This research can advise policymakers, labor officials, trade unions, employer associations, and civil society on the gaps that must be prioritized and the best approaches to advancing the protection of workers' rights. In addition to this, the work provides a platform for the dispossessed voices in the system, those who suffer from inadequate legislation, through the accounts of workers on their awareness, their rights undermined, and their avenues for remedy. The research centers the discourse on labor rights in developing countries while offering perspectives for other countries with similar issues of social protection and economic growth.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the gaps within and between Pakistan's labor protection, covering the fundamental rights of workers acts and the sectors of the economy as a whole.
2. To understand the contribution of labor inspectorates, the judiciary, and public administration and evaluate the functioning of these agencies concerning the implementation and enforcement of labor legislation.

3. To identify the key challenges that hinder the access of employees to the legally available protections and formulate practical strategies aimed at improving the legal protective measures accessible to workers in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the scope of Pakistan's current labor legislation pertaining to the fundamentals of industrial relations as well as the protections afforded to workers in diverse economic sectors and at varying echelons of the economy?
2. To what extent do the conditions associated with legislated rights of workers and employees deviate from the legislation and what explains the enforcement gaps in the economy?
3. What is the extent of awareness of rights held by workers and employees and what structural changes are required to improve enforcement of rights in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

This research study will target many stakeholders engaged in the protection of labor rights in Pakistan. It will produce evidence to aid the empirical research gaps in the mathematical governance enforcement and structural reforms of labor protection. It will also assist workers and trade unions in law enforcement advocacy and the protection of vulnerable workers in the informal economy. Employers and business associations may wish to focus on the evidence to develop managerial frameworks to close compliance gaps and align business practices with legal requirements. This will assist both domestic and international stakeholders in formulating intervention and technical assistance program frameworks focused on advocating labor rights within Pakistan. From an academic perspective, this contributes to the very scarce empirical literature on the enforcement of labor laws in Pakistan and suggests a possible framework for similar studies in other developing countries.

Literature Review

The scholarly analysis of labor legislation and the protection of workers' rights in Pakistan involves a review of laws and the enforcement gaps, as well as the socioeconomic and political dimensions (Shah and Sarif 2023). Pakistan, like any other nation, strives to harmonize its domestic labor legislation with international obligations. By ratifying ILO conventions on the freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labor, child labor, and discrimination in employment, Pakistan is legally mandated to integrate these fundamental rights and obligations into its domestic legislation. Moreover, the literature on employment legislation in Pakistan suggests that the country possesses a relatively comprehensive and well-developed legal framework that covers various aspects of employment relations, labor conditions, and social protection. However, the protection of workers' rights in Pakistan is primarily attributed to the enforcement gap (Ali and Khan 2024).

Pakistan's labor laws reflect the country's colonial history as well as its subsequent history. The demand and supply relations within the country's labor legislation can be traced back to the British colonial legislation. Since independence, Pakistan has operated under the laws such as the 1934 Factories Act and the 1926 Trade Union Act, which described the relations of labor in Pakistan. In the period after independence, until the 1969 Industrial Relations Ordinance, Pakistan incorporated, along with the West Pakistan Maternity Benefit Ordinance of 1958 and the 1969 Shops and Establishments Ordinance, attempts at new legislation to sharpen the new regulatory framework to address the emerging labor challenges of the time (Rasool 2022). The 2010 18th Constitutional Amendment's devolution of labor legislation to the provinces was a major governance change in Pakistani labor history. The provinces created their own laws while many provisions remained federal. This devolution has been criticized by some scholars as lacking context relevant to the provinces, while others counter with ideas of disintegration, disparity among provinces, and diminished enforcement (Ali, Ameer et al. 2025).

A study indicates a prescriptive legislative framework that provides inadequate foundational and basic coverage for the enforcement and protection of workers' rights. Inspecting labor rights literature

highlights the chronic and systemic issues of inadequate human and material resources, poor and basic training of personnel, ineffective supervision and enforcement of the law, and the combined effects of corruption and political interference, along with systemic issues of staff understaffing (Zaheer, Saddique et al. 2025). The gap between the labor inspector and the workforce proximity and the scope and extent of necessary workplace inspections, due to the ratio of labor inspectors to workers, is also a persistent issue in enforcement (Usman, KANWEL et al. 2021). Inadequate penalties for legislative violations with a high level of discretion for not imposing them and the systemic issues of delays in protection of workers' rights is a literature-documented outcome of the inaccessibility of the judicial system, the delays, and the cumbersome complex rules and procedures that economically poor and uneducated workers face. Labor courts and the industrial relations institutions designed to adjudicate labor disputes operate ineffectively due to backlogs, inadequate resources, and procedural irrationality (Parker 2022).

The informal economy can be considered as one of the most considerable challenges for the legal protection of workers' rights in Pakistan. Approximately three-quarters of the country's workers remain outside the legally recognized boundaries of the employment relationship and, consequently, lose access to legal protection (Dharejo, Siddiqui et al. 2023). Informal workers' rights studies cite such extreme and gross violations of fundamental rights and economic rights as: payment of wages lower than the legal minimum, forced labor, lack of clarity in the contracting process, absence of social security, and gross violations of health and safety provisions. These workers operate in a legal and structural void, with no collective bargaining mechanisms and no formal recognition of their labor. A disproportionate number of informal workers are women, particularly those in home-based, domestic, and agricultural labor. These women face additional gendered and economically discriminatory vulnerabilities - in conjunction with the vulnerabilities of the informal economy - such as seclusion, restricted voice, and a lack of legal rights (Hamid and Intan 2024).

The participation of millions of children in so-called prohibited sectors, including domestic servitude, agriculture, brick kilns, and carpet weaving, constitutes a violation of child protection laws and is unresolved and serious. The informalization literature primarily attributes the phenomenon to the stagnation of economic growth and industrialization, informal and rigid labor laws, weak state capacity, and cut/cost compliance practices of employers (Khuong, Shabbir et al. 2021). The historiography of labor in Pakistan serves to showcase the protection of rights of employees via unions and the collective bargaining process. While the constitution guarantees the rights of workers to unions and collective bargaining, the literature also notes the private sector's unionization rates remain particularly low. This can be traced back to the firm's opposition, the workers' retaliation, weak internal unions, state capture, and the enforced legal framework. Literature focusing on the micro level of specific industries reveals the lack of union effectiveness, which is a consequence of fragmentation, lack of leadership, poor resourcing, and restrictions on the right to strike (Jafree 2023).

The literature regarding employers' organizations and workers' rights is limited. However, it is still evident that employers' organizations strive to ease the lobbied conditions of compliance. From their point of view, the legally enforced conditions of compliance are fundamental barriers to economic growth and competitiveness. This remains the case even when multiple reports highlight the existence of positive correlations between economic growth and the relaxation of labor laws, and between productivity and employment creation (Naveed, Rehmani et al. 2022).

Results and Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative component of this research involved a survey of 250 workers distributed across manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors to assess their awareness of labor rights, experiences with workplace conditions, and access to legal protections. The data collected provides empirical

evidence of the significant gaps between legislative provisions and the lived realities of workers in Pakistan.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sector	Manufacturing	100	40%
	Agriculture	80	32%
	Services	70	28%
Gender	Male	180	72%
	Female	70	28%
Employment Type	Formal	68	27%
	Informal	182	73%
Education Level	Illiterate	95	38%
	Primary	82	33%
	Secondary	53	21%
	Higher	20	8%

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N=250)

The demographic composition of survey respondents reflects the broader characteristics of Pakistan's labor force with significant representation from the informal sector and lower education levels. The distribution across manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors ensures comprehensive coverage of major employment areas. The gender ratio, while showing male predominance, includes sufficient female respondents to capture gender-specific experiences. The educational profile reveals that 71 percent of respondents have primary education or less, which has important implications for legal awareness and ability to assert rights. The overwhelming representation of informal workers at 73 percent aligns with national labor force statistics and underscores the extent to which Pakistani workers operate outside formal legal protections.

Rights Category	Aware	Partially Aware	Unaware
Minimum Wage Rights	52 (21%)	28 (11%)	170 (68%)
Working Hours Limits	48 (19%)	35 (14%)	167 (67%)
Occupational Safety Rights	38 (15%)	32 (13%)	180 (72%)
Social Security Benefits	30 (12%)	25 (10%)	195 (78%)
Right to Unionize	25 (10%)	20 (8%)	205 (82%)
Leave Entitlements	42 (17%)	38 (15%)	170 (68%)

Table 2: Awareness of Labor Rights Among Workers (N=250)

The data on awareness levels reveals alarming deficits in workers' knowledge of their fundamental rights under Pakistani labor law. Across all categories of rights, the majority of workers demonstrated complete unawareness, with the situation being particularly dire regarding unionization rights where 82 percent lacked awareness and social security benefits where 78 percent were uninformed. Even basic rights such as minimum wages and working hours limits were unknown to approximately two-thirds of respondents. The partially aware category indicates superficial knowledge is insufficient for effectively claiming rights. These findings suggest that legal provisions remain largely theoretical for most workers who lack the basic knowledge necessary to recognize violations or seek remedies. The

awareness gap is particularly concerning given that informed workers are essential for creating demand-side pressure for law enforcement.

Safety Measures	Provided	Sometimes Provided	Not Provided
Personal Protective Equipment	45 (18%)	35 (14%)	170 (68%)
Safety Training	38 (15%)	28 (11%)	184 (74%)
First Aid Facilities	52 (21%)	40 (16%)	158 (63%)
Emergency Exits	60 (24%)	42 (17%)	148 (59%)
Ventilation/Lighting	75 (30%)	55 (22%)	120 (48%)
Drinking Water	140 (56%)	48 (19%)	62 (25%)

Table 3: Workplace Conditions and Safety Standards Compliance (N=250)

The assessment of workplace safety conditions reveals widespread non-compliance with occupational health and safety regulations across surveyed workplaces. The provision of personal protective equipment, mandated by law for hazardous work environments, was absent for 68 percent of workers, exposing them to significant health and injury risks. Safety training, critical for preventing workplace accidents, was not provided to 74 percent of respondents, indicating employers' systematic neglect of this legal obligation. Emergency preparedness measures showed somewhat better compliance, though still deficient, with approximately 60 percent lacking adequate emergency exits. Basic amenities showed the highest compliance rates, with drinking water available to 56 percent of workers, though even this fundamental necessity was denied to a quarter of respondents. The data demonstrates that occupational safety laws remain largely unenforced, placing workers' lives and health at continuous risk.

Practice	Yes	No	Sometimes
Receiving Minimum Wage	72 (29%)	148 (59%)	30 (12%)
Regular Payment (Monthly)	95 (38%)	85 (34%)	70 (28%)
Overtime Compensation	35 (14%)	185 (74%)	30 (12%)
Written Employment Contract	68 (27%)	175 (70%)	7 (3%)
Wage Slips/Documentation	55 (22%)	182 (73%)	13 (5%)

Table 4: Wage Payment and Compensation Practices (N=250)

The data on wage payment practices exposes systematic violations of fundamental compensation rights enshrined in Pakistan's labor legislation. Most concerning is that 59 percent of workers reported receiving less than the legally mandated minimum wage, with an additional 12 percent receiving it inconsistently, reflecting widespread employer non-compliance with wage laws. Regular monthly payment, a basic requirement for financial stability, was experienced by only 38 percent of respondents, while others faced irregular payments that create economic insecurity. Overtime compensation, legally required for work beyond standard hours, was denied to 74 percent of workers who worked extended hours. The absence of written employment contracts for 70 percent of workers and wage documentation for 73 percent creates conditions where workers cannot prove violations or claim their rights, effectively rendering legal protections meaningless for the majority.

Benefit Type	Receiving	Not Receiving	Don't Know
Social Security (EOBI/SESSI)	42 (17%)	185 (74%)	23 (9%)
Health Insurance	35 (14%)	205 (82%)	10 (4%)
Paid Annual Leave	50 (20%)	180 (72%)	20 (8%)
Sick Leave	48 (19%)	190 (76%)	12 (5%)
Maternity Benefits (Women)	12 (17%)*	52 (74%)*	6 (9%)*

*Percentage calculated from 70 female respondents

Table 5: Access to Social Protection and Benefits (N=250)

Access to social protection schemes reveals the near-complete exclusion of most Pakistani workers from benefits mandated by law. Only 17 percent of respondents were registered with social security institutions, leaving the vast majority without access to old-age pensions, disability benefits, or survivors' benefits despite legal requirements for employer contributions. Health insurance coverage, whether through state schemes or employer-provided plans, was unavailable to 82 percent of workers, forcing them to bear medical expenses entirely from their limited incomes. Leave entitlements, including annual paid leave and sick leave, were denied to approximately three-quarters of respondents, compelling workers to choose between income loss and rest or medical recovery. Among female workers, only 17 percent received maternity benefits despite legal mandates, reflecting both gender-based discrimination and general non-compliance with social protection laws. These findings illustrate how the social safety net fails to reach most workers.

Experience	Yes	No
Experienced Rights Violation	198 (79%)	52 (21%)
Reported Violation to Authorities	25 (13%)*	173 (87%)*
Approached Trade Union	18 (9%)*	180 (91%)*
Sought Legal Assistance	12 (6%)*	186 (94%)*
Violation Addressed	8 (4%)*	190 (96%)*

*Percentage calculated from 198 workers who experienced violations

Table 6: Experience with Rights Violations and Remedial Actions (N=250)

The data on rights violations and remedial actions reveal both the pervasiveness of labor law violations and the near-complete absence of effective recourse mechanisms. An overwhelming 79 percent of workers reported experiencing some form of rights violation during their employment, confirming that legal protections exist largely on paper. However, the response data exposes the profound barriers preventing workers from seeking redress, with only 13 percent of those experiencing violations reporting them to authorities. Union assistance was sought by merely 9 percent, reflecting low unionization rates and limited union effectiveness. Legal assistance was accessed by just 6 percent, indicating barriers including costs, complexity, fear of retaliation, and lack of awareness about legal aid options. Most troubling, only 4 percent of workers who experienced violations reported satisfactory resolution, demonstrating the fundamental ineffectiveness of enforcement and dispute resolution systems.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis for this work involved twenty interviews with primary stakeholders such as labor rights experts, officials from the government's labor department, leaders of trade unions, representatives of employers, and civil society activists. From the transcripts, six central themes focusing on the challenges in the implementation and the instrumental value of protective strategies for improvement in the country regarding the rights of workers were identified.

Theme 1: Institutional Capacity Deficits

All respondents acknowledged the shortage of resources, personnel, and, most importantly, the specialized capabilities of the labor departments and the inspectorates as fundamental barriers to effective law enforcement. One respondent provided a description of the inspectors' situation, stating that each inspector is assigned to 1,000 establishments, making it impossible to conduct any regular inspections. The inspectors get overloaded. While the reality of labor departments is facing under-allocated budgets, government officials still pointed out the lack of funds as configured in the government's 'vehicle, basic equipment and office infrastructure shortage' as a concrete sign of under-allocated budgets. Unions claimed that the silencing of inspectors and their staff was a direct outcome of accepting bribes. The lack of oversight over inspectors, due to low salaries and poor accountability, was said to facilitate non-compliance enforcement. Furthermore, experts cited the ineffectiveness of inspector training as a contributing factor to the modern challenges of enforcement, such as advanced techniques and emerging new workplace circumstances.

Theme 2: Political Economy of Non-Enforcement

According to some of the survey respondents, particular obstacles to the enforcement of strict labor laws are political and economic in nature. On the economic side, some employers, although not all, claimed that the cost of compliance, something that other stakeholders maintain must be taken into account, would in all likelihood be offset by profits that the business would make. Some employers were blunter and more acknowledged that such a position is economically exploitative and unethical for the employee. Labor experts noted that political and business elites have mutually profitable relationships that tolerate the exploitation of workers and undermine the economic and growth position of the worker. Some government actors describing their political meddling in the operations of the labor department cited the avoidance of inspections and the imposition of penalties on politically powerful businesses. Union leaders explaining the enforcement deficit politically argued that labor rights simply lack a constituency, that is, no significant political party is really contesting the issue, apart from some meaningless rhetoric.

Theme 3: Informal Sector Exclusion

Legislation neglecting to protect informal sector employees may be one of the most critical gaps concerning labor rights in Pakistan. All categories of respondents identified 73% of informal laborers who are most vulnerable to current laws and are ignored by effective legislation as an enormous gap in the protection of labor rights. Experts indicated the intentional circumvention of obligations by informal contracting and informal work arrangements designed to escape obligations and costs of compliance. Casual employment, along with the absence of written contracts, serves as a device to avoid legal obligations undertaken by employers. Civil society representatives concerning adverse working conditions described them as catastrophic and exploitative to the extreme, exposing those workers to hazardous environments with no social security whatsoever despite the fact that those workers perform the same tasks, services, and functions as their formally employed counterparts. Union representatives indicated the legal and administrative vacuum concerning the recognition of informal workers' rights to organize, and the general climate of fear that prevails over informal workers. Bureaucrats recognized the obstruction administrative burdens of informal sectors present but did not deny the absence of a moral and legal claim to be incorporated.

Theme 4: Workers' Knowledge and Empowerment Gaps

Respondents consistently cited workers' unawareness about their rights as a prominent gap contributing to ineffective protections, which in turn, results in the underutilization of enforcement avenues. Labor educators illustrated how the absence of rights education in the school curriculum, coupled with low levels of literacy and ineffective public rights outreach, results in a significant proportion of workers lacking knowledge of even the most rudimentary legal workplace rights. Furthermore, enforcement on the economic demand side is likely to be weak, as empowered, informed

workers remain absent, and ignorant workers will not demand enforcement of rights or service protest. Union constituencies explained how employers incentivize economically dysfunctional unawareness and discourage the circulation of rights knowledge. They foster an environment of fear and intimidation, framing any rights discourse as a form of insubordination and defiance. Government officials acknowledged the lack of effort to disseminate basic legal rights information in practical, non-textual formats and in predominantly English and formal Urdu texts. Civil society luminaries pointed to the need for community education, sustained confidence building, the distribution of information, and the assertion of rights.

Theme 5: Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities

The participants note that women employees face additional challenges in accessing protections due to discrimination against women, social norms around gender, and additional forms of exclusion. Advocates for women's rights note that women employees face unequal and excessive vulnerability, particularly in marginal home-based work, domestic work, and agricultural work, where there is little to no legal protection. Experts state that social control over women's movement, the requirement for work-seeking men to obtain male permission, and the stigma associated with women's complaints about work are barriers men do not face. Government workers are of the view that the gaps are due to labor department's not applying gender-sensitive approaches, suggesting that male inspectors are unable to, or do not wish to, engage with issues of harassment, spousal rights, and discrimination that affect women. Union leaders pointed to the intersection of domestic work, the male-centric configuration of unions, and the social taboo on women's activism as explanations for women's marginalization in union structures. Among the respondents, many expressed that the advancement of rights for women workers is better realized through the gaps in the laws, which augments the prevailing socio-economic inequities.

Theme 6: Legal and Judicial System Inadequacies

The design and operation of the legal and judicial systems contribute to barriers to the justice associated with violations of workers' rights. Legal professionals have described situations where disputes have remained unresolved for many years. During this drawn-out process, the worker generally loses their job and has limited or no financial resources to pursue the issue in court. Advocacy in this field has highlighted the considerable complexity and the cost of legal services, the absence of the relevant documentary evidence that workers are expected to provide, and the result that formal, and even informal, systems of justice are effectively inaccessible. Interviewed judges and other members of the judiciary acknowledged the existence of court backlogs and, in labor-related cases, the absence of specialization. This has resulted in unequal and inconsistent application of the law, and a lack of understanding of the labor rights problem. Judicial officers who represent trade unions have pointed to the core issue of weak legislative provisions and the lack of effective sanctions, even in rare cases where a conviction is achieved. Recommendations included simplified alternative dispute resolution systems, extended legal aid access for employees, prioritization of labor caseloads, and substantial increases in penalties for violations.

Discussion

This research illustrates how not enough is being done in Pakistan regarding the enforcement of workers' rights even if there exists a comprehensive legal framework. Most workers view their rights as a somewhat abstract concept. The claim that 68-82 percent of workers do not know their rights, the 79 percent having rights violations, and the 4 percent having even the most basic violations resolved points towards a pervasive and systemic deficit in the practical application of legal protections. Qualitative responses that pertain to the weaknesses of institutions, the political economy of capital as opposed to labor, the informal economy, and the political and legal inaction/deficiencies. Most

troubling is the gap in legal coverage for 73 percent of the informal economy, the inequitable legal, socio-economic, and systemic imbalances that disproportionately impact women workers. This results in a dual legal system that permits a select and powerful few to access their legal “rights” while denying the rest of society any legal rights. This is consistent with the findings regarding enforcement of labor rights in developing countries. Generally, there is a greater deficit when it comes to enforcement as opposed to the legislation itself.

Using comparative analyses against international labor standards, it can be argued that while Pakistan does have legally enforceable protections, they are imperfect. This suggests that, rather than pursuing further legislation, Pakistan should focus on implementing enforcement mechanisms. This aids in illustrating the policy debate on the hypothetical trade-off between the economic competitiveness of a country and the appropriate level of labor protections. Yet this empirical evidence suggests that the status quo, which provides no protection and no flexibility in the labor market for growth, fosters unprotected exploitative conditions that erode human capital and economic growth in a sustained manner.

Conclusion

A considerable body of labor laws exists in Pakistan; however, the crisis in the enforcement of these laws constitutes a serious breach of workers’ rights. A portion of the evidence suggests that a considerable segment of the nation's workers does not understand the basic rights afforded to them by law, do not effectively qualify for minimum wage, safe workplace conditions, and social security, and lack access to mechanisms that enable them to protect their rights. With informal employment accounting for nearly 75 percent of the workforce, the most serious and vicious of rights violations, including those against women and children, occur in the shadows of the law and outside the reach of any legal regulation. Labor law enforcement, the labor inspectorate, the judiciary, and even the courts operate with chronic dysfunction in resourcing, political capture, and litigation system inefficiency. In Pakistan, the enforcement of labor rights reveals a governance posture of deliberate calculation in which the interests of the business community are served at the expense of workers.

Addressing this implementation crisis requires reinforcing institutional capacity, providing legal protection to the informal sector, empowering workers through rights education, fostering accountability, and building genuine political will around the recognition of workers’ rights in the context of social justice and sustainable development. Without the appropriate changes, injustices will remain woven into the fabric of Pakistan’s labor laws, economically productive workers will continue to be economically exploited and socially marginalized, and millions will be denied basic dignity, legal recognition, and protection.

Recommendations

Workers’ rights in Pakistan must be defended first because of the findings in the above report. The control-and-prevention inspection civil servant's policing framework must be expanded to include rights-protection inspectors and include further investment in pay, technological instruments, and coverage area to combat malfeasance. Rights are legal claims. Workers must be taught, in multiple and accessible ways, what these rights entail. Rights-claims awareness must be included in systematic national education frameworks and outreach in multiple mass- and community-level media as well as through local workplace rights literature, primary and secondary schooling, and curricula. Regulatory oversight, frameworks, and compliance capture of the informal sector should be included. Rights should be portable to informal sector workers. Restrictions must be lifted to include in home provisions, and safeguards should include domestic and agricultural workers. Labor law fines should be increased for the simple reason of creating actual deterrence. In the case of serious violations that result in death and possible injury, fines should be mandated and jail terms included. The workplace mechanisms must be included in the local governance structures.

Along with supporting women in trade unions, the enforcement of laws against workplace harassment, the enforcement of maternity leave policies, the implementation of gender-sensitive workplace

policies, and the prioritization of women workplace issues, the inclusion of women labor inspectors must be integrated in gender-responsive labor governance.

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