

Case Study: Recognizing Women Agricultural Workers in Pakistan's Labour Code 2024 – A Milestone in Social Protection

In Pakistan, agricultural workers have long been the backbone of the economy, contributing significantly to food security and rural development. Yet, historically, these workers—especially women—have been excluded from formal labor protections. Despite their crucial roles, women agricultural workers faced numerous vulnerabilities, including low wages, limited access to social protection, and lack of formal recognition as laborers, which restricted them from accessing basic workers' rights.

Responding to years of advocacy efforts made by AwazCDS-Pakistan and other Civil Society organizations, the government has introduced the Labour Code 2024, which now formally acknowledges agricultural workers, including women, as laborers deserving of the same protections as those in other sectors.

With this inclusion, women agricultural workers will benefit from several critical protections. The code grants them access to healthcare under national social security schemes, ensuring that women in rural communities, especially those who are mothers, can receive healthcare support and preventive services. For the first time, they are now also entitled to minimum wage protections, which is a significant move toward addressing financial inequality and reducing exploitation in rural labor markets. Additionally, the Labour Code enables access to retirement and pension schemes, providing long-term financial security to these workers as they age. Recognized agricultural workers will also benefit from maternity leave, which aligns with international labor standards, and they are now eligible for on-site childcare support where feasible, improving their ability to work without compromising family care.

The formal recognition also mandates safer working conditions, with requirements for occupational safety training and protective equipment where needed. The Punjab Social Protection Authority (PSPA) and other provincial bodies are leading the implementation efforts, though the code's success will depend on effective coordination among agencies and careful monitoring to ensure the benefits reach the intended workers. Awareness campaigns are being planned to inform women laborers of their new rights, while employers will also be guided on compliance.

By bringing women agricultural workers into the formal labor framework, Pakistan takes a substantial step toward a more equitable labor market, advancing economic security, health, and well-being for rural women and their families. This initiative is expected to bring long-term benefits for both individuals and communities, supporting Pakistan's vision of inclusive and resilient growth.