

## **Access to Justice for GBV Survivors: Improving Protection, Prevention and Response (PPR) Services**

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### **Rationale for the Intervention: Existing Challenges**

In recent years, the State has made attempts to address the issue of violence against women, through various legislative and policy initiatives to create mechanisms to support survivors and to address protection and resettlement issues related to violence against women and girls. However, their impact has been limited due to a lack of trained and specialized human resources to provide an effective response to women in distress. The lag in the implementation of laws and policies and the inability of existing mechanisms to provide relief to survivors can be attributed to the low levels of gender sensitization and the absence of a human rights approach to protection.

In Pakistan, victims and survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) face many structural and systemic barriers in obtaining access to justice. Services to GBV survivors are being offered in silos through ad hoc systems, which slip through the cracks due to the lack of standardization of protection and response services. Most services are clustered in urban areas leaving a large proportion of survivors outside the realm of protection. A multi-pronged, comprehensive, and collaborative approach needs to be developed for the provision of an efficient system for prevention, protection, relief, and rehabilitation of women against all forms of violence in Punjab.

### **Proposed Approach**

Given the current context, there is an urgent need to apply a rights-based, standardized, and coordinated response to improve GBV survivors' access to justice which is founded on human rights principles, aligned with global best practices, and grounded in a common understanding of gender-based violence. It is necessary to focus on building capacity through the creation of skilled and trained human resources and to integrate effective use of existing mechanisms in responses to GBV by practitioners. Further, there is also a need to expand the GBV protection mechanisms to include the transgender community and to build community support for initiatives against GBV.

The Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016 and the Punjab Women Protection Authority Act 2017 together establish a Provincial Protection System to deal with GBV. In its latest initiative, Dastak focuses on activating the Punjab GBV protection system and improving access to justice for GBV survivors by improving Protection, Prevention, and Response (PPR) Services. The services envisaged for operating the Protection System can only be availed if all those who are responsible for delivering the services are well trained and have the knowledge and skills to provide effective assistance and support to victims. Thus, there is a need to enhance knowledge on the use of existing mechanisms to improve the efficiency and performance of existing GBV laws. To meet this objective, it is essential to focus on capacity building, by developing training modules and conducting workshops, to ensure that the personnel responsible for delivering the services have the knowledge and skills to fulfill their respective mandates effectively.

These outcomes will go a long way in increasing the potential for success in combatting GBV and also providing a way forward for other provinces, enabling civil society as well as policymakers to design implementation plans for existing laws and policies and to advocate legislative initiatives where required.