

Charter of Demands for Disability Rights

Disability Rights Advocates Mobilize for Inclusive Elections

In 2023, the Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) and IFES brought together 200 people with disabilities, disability rights advocates and government representatives in policy dialogues that culminated in the creation and presentation of a national Charter of Demands for Disability Rights in Islamabad in March 2023.

While Pakistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2011 and introduced legal measures to facilitate their electoral participation, people with disabilities confront barriers to exercising their democratic rights. For example, lack of accessible transportation makes it difficult to travel to polling stations, and many cannot complete the cumbersome process to obtain their special national identity card that provides disability benefits and voting access.

The Charter of Demands – created by advocates with disabilities, is a critical step toward enhancing equal access to democratic rights. During the presentation of the Charter of Demands, elected leaders, representatives from the Ministry of Human Rights and the Election Commission of Pakistan, and other decision makers expressed support for several key provisions. These also included establishing a National Advisory Council for Disability Rights.

The Charter of Demands is part of IFES' Pakistan Fair and Inclusive Representation (PFAIR) program, which is carried out with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). IFES is implementing the PFAIR program, funded by the U.S. Department of State, to enhance access to democratic rights for marginalized groups in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



IFES, in collaboration with STEP, hosted a Policy Dialogue in KP to facilitate discussions on the Charter of Demands for disability rights (03 March, 2023)

"This is for the first time in my whole career that we (persons with disabilities) are given an opportunity to raise our voices for our rights along with STEP, IFES and other disability rights advocates. We developed and presented COD in this policy dialogue and now will advocate it further until we get it passed from KP Assembly."
Abdul Wahab – Executive Director of (OPD, Khyber)



IFES through STEP organized capacity building training for members of the OPDs from the newly merged districts to build their capacity, individual knowledge, and understanding on the national and international legal framework in KP province (18-21 October 2022)

“Empowering individuals with disabilities to understand and engage in the political process is not just a crucial step towards achieving their rights, but also towards building a more inclusive society. Through the IFES training, we have gained valuable knowledge and tools that will help us effectively advocate for persons with diverse disabilities especially women. The impact of this initiative will be felt far beyond just our organization, as we work towards creating a more accessible and equitable democracy for all.”

Ms. ABIYA AKRAM (PROGRAM DIRECTOR, STEP) DURING POLICY DIALOGUE, KP



The Charter of Demands was informed by a series of related disability rights-focused consultations and initiatives that helped prioritize key electoral accessibility issues and ensure the Charter of Demands is effectively presented to government decision makers. Select initiatives include:

- An Election Accessibility Assessment carried out during KP's Local Government Election in 2021 and 2022 that highlighted key barriers to inclusive elections. STEP trained 154 observers, mostly persons with disabilities, in five target districts to assess electoral accessibility across 255 polling stations.
- Advocacy capacity building training for ten emerging organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), who – with IFES and STEP support – are seeking formal registration with social welfare department and are leading advocacy around Charter of Demand priorities with their provincial and local leaders.
- Implementation of a 15-day community-based Inclusive NIC/Voter Education Campaign that, led by OPDs, uses a diversity of accessible platforms and materials to communicate the process for citizens to obtain a Special National Identity Card, and the benefits of this identification for people with disabilities.

"The National 5-year plan of Pakistan has recognized the importance of disability inclusion, however there is still work to be done in addressing technical aspects such as their inclusion in the electoral process. The Charter of Demands will substantially help address this issue."

Mr. Nisar Ahmed (Chief Planning Ministry of Human Rights during Policy Dialogue, Islamabad)



IFES through STEP Team is conducting a Situation Analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of SNIC registration, means and public awareness, training needs, physical accessibility of relevant departments and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral processes in KP

"For over 20 years, we have been facing difficulties in achieving the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in national and provincial assemblies. However, without raising awareness and educating persons with disabilities on how to participate in the electoral and political processes, this goal cannot be attained."

Ms. Kishwar Zehra (Political Representative) during Policy Dialogue, Islamabad

"As long as gender equality is not ensured in political process, until then, a true democratic system cannot be generated. Persons with Disabilities and their collective voice remains the hidden potential of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and can fundamentally create sustainable peace leading to an effective democratic system in Pakistan"

Ms. Zille Huma (Political Representative) during Policy Dialogue, Islamabad

"The Election Commission of Pakistan is collaborating with organizations such as IFES and STEP to ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote in the upcoming elections. The Commission recognizes the importance of enabling all individuals to have a voice in the decision-making process & is taking steps to make this a reality"

Ms. Nighat Siddique (Additional Director General, Election Commission of Pakistan) during Policy Dialogue, Islamabad

March 16, 2023
National Library of Pakistan

