

2024 Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards Regional Awardee Profile



WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT
PRINCIPLES



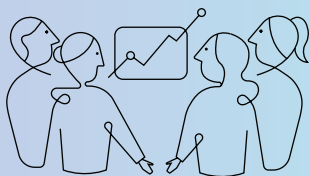
Khurrum Ashfaque,
CEO of Telenor Pakistan
September 2023 to Aug 2025

Telenor Pakistan

About the Company

Name: Telenor Pakistan
Country: Pakistan
Employees: 1001 – 5000
Percentage of women employees:
Between 21% – 25%

Website:
<https://www.telenor.com.pk/>



Telenor Pakistan is a leading telecommunications company that provides a wide range of mobile and Internet services across the country. As part of the global Telenor Group, it is committed to promoting digital inclusion while delivering innovative and reliable communication solutions.

Driving female representation at Telenor Pakistan

Telenor Pakistan is the third-largest player in the telecom industry in Pakistan, with strong diversity credentials: women hold 40 per cent of board positions, 25 per cent at the CXO level and 18 per cent at the extended management level. In 2023, the company saw female representation decline, with turnover among women employees rising to 22 per cent. Much of this change was shaped by external pressures. Intensified industry competition and new regulatory requirements created strong demand for a limited pool of qualified female professionals, making retention increasingly difficult. At the same time, macroeconomic instability - driven by inflation and wider socioeconomic uncertainty - contributed to rising emigration as skilled workers sought opportunities abroad. While these dynamics affected both men and women, prevailing social norms meant that when men migrated for work, entire families often relocated with them. This pattern led to a disproportionate loss of female professionals from

the Pakistani workforce, even among women with established careers of their own.

In response, CEO Khurrum Ashfaque championed transformative Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives under Telenor's People First strategy. In 2024 he spearheaded the development and rollout of a strategic roadmap structured around the pillars of Attract, Uplift and Embrace to draw, retain and develop female talent. Backed by strong leadership, the roadmap included clear key performance indicators, milestones and measurable outcomes to ensure accountability and track progress at every stage.

Flagship initiatives included the *Naya Aghaaz* (Urdu for "A New Beginning") returnship programme, supporting mid-career women re-entering the workforce after breaks, and the *Parvaaz* programme (Urdu for "Flight / Soar") trainee



programme, which increased female recruitment in hardship areas and male-dominated divisions such as business, sales and distribution. In 2024, 70 per cent of *Naya Aghaaz* associates were hired permanently and eight out of 14 women secured permanent positions through the first *Parvaaz* cohort. The company also invested in providing more than 100 cumulative hours of classroom learning, field visits, on-the-job training and mentoring for participants.

Khurrum also improved retention by spearheading family-friendly policies and enhancing employee benefits. Benefits include pay parity, flexible work arrangements and a 100 per cent increase in allowances for daycare and transport to and from the office for female employees. His direct involvement ensured that these measures were actionable and impactful.

Championing women's leadership within and beyond the workplace

Khurrum prioritized building a strong pipeline of female leaders at all organizational levels through flagship programmes such as EmpowHer for Today and EmpowHer to Lead. In 2024, EmpowHer for Today delivered two successful cohorts, training 150 women through a blend of classroom and experiential learning. The programme focused on both personal and professional development, equipping participants with skills to grow and advance within the company. At the senior level, EmpowHer to Lead engaged all female senior managers through immersive business simulation workshops, helping them strengthen their strategic thinking and leadership presence. To further support this group, Telenor introduced a specialized coaching initiative to help senior women leaders refine and elevate their leadership capabilities.

*At Telenor Pakistan,
we see **diversity and inclusion**
as strategic enablers of
innovation and growth.*

*The journey has not been without
its challenges, but every action that
Telenor Pakistan has taken towards
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
has been rooted in the belief that
equity and parity not only promote
an inclusive mindset across the
organization but also place us
closer to our customers.*

*Our ambition is not only to
transform our own organization
but to set a standard that uplifts
communities across Pakistan.*

Khurrum Ashfaque,
CEO, Telenor Pakistan

In 2024, Telenor Pakistan launched the Inclusion Allies initiative to cultivate DEI champions across the organization. Forty extended management team members, including Vice Presidents, Directors and Heads of Department, received capacity-building training and were supported to set self-defined DEI goals and lead by example, reinforcing inclusive leadership across the company.

Beyond internal efforts, Khurrum advanced external partnerships to amplify the Telenor Pakistan's impact. In collaboration with the Champions of Change Coalition Pakistan, Telenor launched the Champions of Change Women Leadership Programme in 2024. The inaugural cohort, held at Telenor's Islamabad headquarters, featured a keynote session by the Minister of Information and Technology, a panel discussion with industry leaders (including Khurrum and CEOs of Pepsi, Daraz and Catalyst Labs) and a day of training and workshops on communication, time management, personal branding and leadership. The programme empowered 100 women from 30 member organizations.

To support young women entering the workforce, Telenor introduced the Catalyst Programme in 2024, engaging 90 final-year women students from seven universities in Islamabad with mentorship and career-readiness training across disciplines.

Further advancing digital inclusion, Telenor partnered with the GSMA Connected Women Programme to close the gender gap in mobile Internet usage. Another standout initiative, Khushal Angan, is a digital solution designed to empower female farmers across Pakistan by providing access to information, resources and market opportunities. Through such partnerships, Khurrum has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing gender equality not only within Telenor but also across communities and industries nationwide.

Shaping sustainable change for gender equality

Khurrum's leadership in advancing women's empowerment at Telenor Pakistan has been transformative. By aligning robust internal policies with impactful external partnerships, he has created a sustainable framework for DEI initiatives, setting a benchmark for the industry. These efforts contributed to measurable progress: women's representation rose by four percentage points in 2024 compared to 2023, while more than 250 women employees participated in development initiatives that strengthened critical skills and supported their career advancement. As a result, 38 per cent of women employees received promotions or career progressions during the year.

Hiring practices have also advanced, with the female hiring ratio increasing from 24 to 30 per cent in 2024. Pay equity improved, with Telenor Pakistan achieving a 95 per cent pay parity rate, verified by Mercer's 2024 survey. Overall, Telenor's DEI representation grew from 17 to 21.4 per cent, underscoring the tangible impact of the company's strategy.



A key driver of these successes was Khurrum's proactive approach in addressing unconscious bias, promoting a speak-up culture and building a female talent pipeline. Sensitization and awareness programmes helped overcome cultural barriers, while his transparent communication style built trust and buy-in across the organization.

Looking ahead, Khurrum is committed to institutionalizing these programmes and policies to ensure that they are embedded in Telenor Pakistan's culture and operations. In 2025, the company introduced an industry-first part-time work scheme for women, *Nayi Raah* ("New Path"), offering roles based on a 20-hour work week. Through these initiatives, Telenor Pakistan aims to set new benchmarks for gender equality and women's empowerment in the telecom sector and beyond.

Women's Empowerment Principles



High-Level Corporate Leadership



Treat all Women and Men Fairly at Work without Discrimination



Employee Health, Well-Being and Safety



Education and Training for Career Advancement



Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices



Community Initiatives and Advocacy



Measurement and Reporting



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#GenderActionLab #WEPsAwards



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