

Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release

The Ehsaas Labour Group Convenes Twice this week

May 30, 2019 – Islamabad: The Labour Social Protection Expert Group was constituted under the aegis of Ehsaas, the government’s signature social protection program. The Group is mandated to give evidence-based but feasible and practical recommendations to Dr. Sania Nishtar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection & Poverty Alleviation, regarding extension of social protection services to the informal labor sector in the first phase of its working.

The Expert Group has met four times since its creation including twice this week. Key labour stakeholders have been attending meetings consistently. These include Mr. Zahoor Awan, Secretary General of the Pakistan Workers Federation, Daud Abdullah, Director Labour Punjab, Irfan Ullah Khan, Director Labour KPK, Iftikhar Ahmed, Competitive Labour Law specialist, Shaukat Ali Khan, Director Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Waqar Hasan, Director Labour Islamabad Capital Territory, Ingrid Christensen, Country Director International Labour Organization along with Rabia Razzaque and Saghir Bokhari from ILO, Dr Aliya Khan, Member EAC, Dr Lubna Shahnaz, Member PRIDE, Majyd Aziz, President Employer’s Federation Pakistan, Raja Faizue, Consultant, and Shaista Sohail, Secretary Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety Division along with other staff.

Earlier this week on May 27th, in its 3rd meeting the Pakistan Bureau of Statistic gave a detailed presentation on the Labour Force Survey (LFS), highlighting the methodology used for conducting the LFS. The group decided to increase the sample size to enable data disaggregation by category of informal groups, to inform policy in the future.

Several presentations were made in this meeting by provincial Labour departments.

The group was of the unanimous opinion that the first problem to tackle is the informal worker and, therefore, the key matter under consideration related to registration of informal workers. International experiences were discussed, in particular the Brazilian model, where the government has been successful in formalizing the informal economy. The Labour Expert Group will be studying this model in depth and make work towards similar frameworks to incentivize registration.

At the conclusion of the meeting Dr. Sania Nishtar, said that the government’s main focus was on developing social security solutions for the informal sector as an entry point to labour force public policy. She urged the Labour Expert Group to come up with ‘disruptive’ but ‘constructive’ solutions to challenge status quo.

The second meeting of the Labour Expert Group this week was held on May 30th, where a presentation was given on international best practices in extending social services to the private sector. The group was presented examples of laws and regulations that have worked in other parts of the world.

The first presentation was given by Directorate of Labour, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Director of Labour informed the group about existing Labour Acts, and rules of business governing these Acts, in the province. Legislation in KPK requires enterprises to pay their workers through scheduled banks. The group thought this was a great policy that documents the workers and touches on financial inclusion.

The following two presentations focused on formalizing the informal sector. The presentation by ILO provided definition of the informal employment as interpreted by the respective body, and suggested that Pakistan should include certain employees as formal that are currently considered informal. The implementation of the Domestic Workers Bill in Philippines was presented as an example. The last presentation by the President of the Employers Federation Pakistan highlighted similar issues. He stressed that the laws need to be simplified, and emphasized the need for a new development strategy. .

The agenda for the next meeting of the group will discuss existing labour laws and is scheduled to convene later. The group decided that they need to note down group meeting recommendations so they can be deliberated in depth moving forward. The discussions will focus on formalizing the informal economy, and once recommendations are locked and issued, the group will move to the next agenda.