

Pakistan: Transgender rights

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Members of the transgender community in the country are often at the receiving end of both their families' and society's censure and derision. Most are rejected and disowned by their families, while for its part, society sees them as lesser humans. As a result, members of the trans community face severe discrimination in jobs, education and even healthcare. Unprotected, they are vulnerable to violence against them, which has several times proved fatal. They number among the most marginalised communities in the country.

Against this background, the opening of the country's first Transgender Protection Centre in Islamabad is a commendable initiative and should hopefully lend some much-needed institutional support to the community. The centre will act as a shelter for transpeople, while also providing them with psychological and career counselling services. Launched as part of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, the centre holds the promise of empowering transpeople and giving them authority and decision-making powers in the set-up. Though ad hoc decisions and projects have been announced by several provincial departments, these have lacked both political will and resources to ensure a lasting impact. For example, the Sindh government announced in 2019 that it would reserve 0.5pc jobs in all government departments for transpeople. But not much seems to have transpired since then. For its part, the KP government proposed a 2pc job quota for transpersons, while also mulling over the option of reserving 5pc scholarships in higher education and 1pc seats in schools and vocational institutions for them. Unfortunately, it is not clear what has become of this plan. There are around 300,000 transgender people in the country as per a 2019 court census. But the actual number is projected to be higher. The opening of the first centre should prod the provinces to establish similar shelters for the community. It would send a strong message to those who shun transpersons that the state is ready to defend a community that has been stigmatised and threatened at all levels.

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