

Becoming the bank of choice for women in Pakistan



About HBL:

Habib Bank Limited (HBL) was established in 1941 as the first commercial bank in Pakistan. It has grown to become Pakistan's largest private sector bank, with over 1,700 branches, 2,000 ATMs globally, and a customer base exceeding ten million relationships.

Our gender partnership

We supported HBL in developing a Gender Action Plan to improve the representation and retention of women across its workforce as a key driver of its ambitions to reach more female customers.

Impact highlights

- + Increased HBL's representation of women in its workforce, tracking positively towards its 25 per cent women employees target by 2025
- + Adoption of gender-sensitive workplace policies
- + Implementation of gender inclusive recruitment practices





Setting the scene

Meaningfully advancing women's economic participation and opportunities in Pakistan is challenging. Pakistan is one of the lowest-ranked countries in the world on the Global Gender Gap Index report (145 out of 156 in 2022). One of the biggest gaps is in terms of labour force participation; for example, women make up only 11 per cent of the workforce in the financial services sector. A host of factors, ranging from a lack of conducive policies, mobility challenges and social norms, constrain women from entering and being retained in the formal workforce.

Despite this context, HBL – under the guidance of its founding shareholder, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) – saw an opportunity to better serve women and set out to become their bank of choice. In 2016, HBL introduced Nisa, a women-only banking platform. Nisa was designed to improve the banking experiences of existing women customers as well as to attract more women clients to the bank. However, the success of Nisa compelled HBL to address its own

workforce gender imbalance. In 2015 women represented only 12 per cent of its employees. This was a notable improvement from 2005 (when this figure stood at 3 per cent), but insufficient to position it as the bank of choice for women in Pakistan.

Acknowledging the imperative of aligning internal practices with external objectives, HBL accelerated efforts to embed gender diversity as a strategic pillar for the bank. This commitment began with the formation of a Diversity Council in 2018, tasked with implementing gender-inclusive policies and programmes for both internal employees and external women customers.

Drawing on our expertise, we further worked with HBL to launch an ambitious Gender Action Plan that would integrate gender diversity into its organisational fabric. Through targeted training sessions, we empowered HBL's leadership and employees to recognise the business case for diversity, highlighting its transformative impact on performance, innovation, and customer engagement.



HBL and BII: partnership timeline

2015

We make a \$121 million direct equity investment for 5 per cent of HBL



2018–2019

We work with HBL to develop a Gender Action Plan with targets to improve policies and procedures designed to improve the representation and retention of women across their workforce, including leadership



2020

We deliver gender-smart banking training for senior management, including the CEO and Executive Committee



2021

We deliver gender-smart banking training for mid-management through a 'train the trainer' approach



2022

HBL awarded 'Most Inclusive Organisation of 2022' by the Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmarks

2015



2018–2019



2020



2021



2022



Rolling out the Gender Action Plan

Launched in 2019, HBL's Gender Action Plan, comprised three priority areas: leadership, staffing, and retention, and proposed a range of supportive policies and procedures. The plan also introduced impact measurement and accountability mechanisms, including targets against which progress would be regularly reported to the Board of Governors.

Gender Action Plan overview and targets

| Plan | Baseline at 2018 | Target by 2025 |
|---|---|--|
| Increase women's leadership, including in management, senior management, and Board of Governors | 9 per cent women in management and leadership roles | 15 per cent women in management and leadership roles |
| Attract female talent by ensuring gender-inclusive policies and procedures | 16 per cent women employees | 25 per cent women employees |
| Reduce turnover rates for women employees | 14 per cent women turnover rate | 10 per cent women turnover rate |

As a next step, we conducted training to embolden senior management to lead and manage teams to reach their targets. We delivered gender-smart banking training to all of HBL's 180 senior managers, including the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Executive Committee, and a further 170 mid-level managers. The training outlines the strategic advantages of championing gender and diversity, including the business benefits of targeting women customers, and enhanced performance opportunities from building gender diverse teams. Later throughout 2021 and 2022, this same training was then delivered to all HBL employees, combined with safeguarding training also developed with our Environmental & Social (E&S) team.

HBL's momentum in this work is attributable to its steadfast commitment to diversity, consistent support from senior leadership, and its trust in our technical leadership. HBL's Gender Champion and Gender Team played a pivotal role in optimising the impact of our work. They were already convinced of the business case, so they put all their resources behind it, prioritised it, and communicated it within the business.



Our gender impact to-date

Following our targeted support, HBL has continued to implement its Gender Action Plan and its dedication to diversity and inclusion makes it a pioneer in the South Asian banking industry. Notably, HBL has partnered with Visa's "She's Next" and Circle Women's "She Loves Tech" programmes to support women entrepreneurs.

HBL has also championed individuals like Pakistan's Bakhtawar Kiyani, the first female Asian blind archer at the 2023 World Games. Furthermore, HBL has facilitated meaningful dialogue on DEI through the first-of-its-kind Diversity Power Hour event, bringing together professionals across Pakistan's leading sectors. Most recently, in late 2023, HBL reaffirmed its dedication by becoming a signatory to the United Nations Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs), reinforcing its commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the workplace, marketplace, and community.

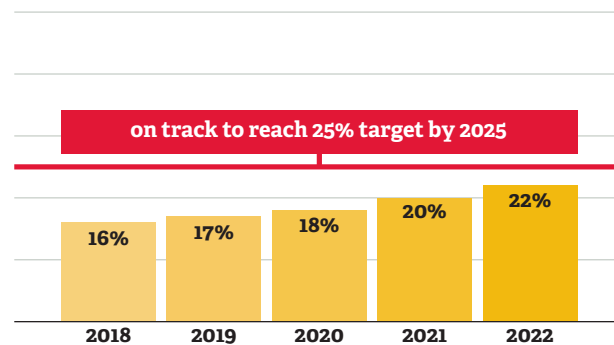
We are excited to continue our collaborative efforts with HBL. Our shared goal is to proactively identify opportunities to deepen gender diversity efforts, ensuring that HBL's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and women's empowerment remains at the forefront of its operations.

Impact highlights

Increased HBL's representation of women in its workforce

HBL's share of women in its workforce grew by six percentage points between 2018 and 2022, and the company is on track to meet its 25 per cent female workforce target by 2025. In 2023, it also onboarded its first female Agriculture Finance Officer in Hunza and its first female Retail Lending Head in Jhelum, marking significant milestones in these areas.

Share of women employees at HBL (2018–2022)



Increased brand value

In 2022, HBL was awarded 'Most Inclusive Organisation', having won awards in all 15 categories for Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmarks.

Adoption of gender-sensitive workplace policies

HBL has adopted a suite of gender-sensitive workplace policies aimed at promoting the well-being and professional growth of women within its organisation. These initiatives include flexible work arrangements, maternity, paternity, and miscarriage leave, as well as support measures such as daycare allowances and maternity gifts. Additionally, HBL offers mentorship programmes and professional development opportunities tailored to empower women in their careers. It also maintains a zero-tolerance stance towards gender-based violence and harassment, as reinforced by its strong Anti-Harassment Policy.

Implementation of gender inclusive recruitment practices

HBL is implementing a range of targeted recruitment practices aimed at fostering gender diversity and inclusion. These initiatives include developing university partnerships with a focus on gender diversity, creating tailored curriculum and mentorship programmes to support the professional growth of female students, offering scholarships to women from underserved communities, and instituting returnship programmes designed to support women who have taken career breaks.