

One Firm, Many Regulators: The Case for Regulatory Harmonisation

Businesses operating across Pakistan often encounter multiple registrations, licences, inspections, product requirements, labour-related contributions and reporting obligations. Similar activities may be governed by different rules - or the same rule may be interpreted differently - across provinces and by federal regulators. Hidden requirements, overlapping approvals, repeated information requests and inconsistent enforcement raise direct compliance costs and uncertainty, discouraging formalisation, expansion, investment and entry into export markets.

The challenge is not to make every rule identical or to weaken legitimate safeguards. Following devolution, many regulatory responsibilities rest with the provinces, and differences may reflect local risks, administrative capacity or policy choices. At the same time, firms operate within a national market in which goods, services and workers move across jurisdictions. Reform, therefore, requires a disciplined choice between simplification, harmonisation, mutual recognition, regulatory equivalence, common minimum standards and, in limited cases, joint administration - while preserving health, labour, environmental, consumer protection, competition and other public interest objectives.

The recent '[Asaan Karobar Act, 2025](#)' has moved Pakistan's regulatory reform agenda towards a permanent institutional framework. It provides for an [Asaan Karobar Technical Unit within the Board of Investment \(BOI\)](#), a [Pakistan Regulatory Registry](#), a [Pakistan Business Portal](#) and structured review and decision-making arrangements. The key issue is how this architecture can become authoritative and useful across federal and consenting provincial jurisdictions without collapsing distinct mandates into a single central authority.

The system must address both the existing stock of regulation and the continuing flow of new rules. A registry can expose hidden, obsolete or duplicative requirements, but cataloguing alone will not reduce burdens. Existing and proposed requirements should be tested for necessity, legal authority, proportionality, clarity, consistency, enforceability, competition effects, compliance cost and measurable public benefit. Likewise, the Pakistan Business Portal should not merely digitalise fragmented processes: legal review, process re-engineering, common data standards, elimination of duplicate requirements, published service levels, traceable decisions and accessible grievance routes should precede or accompany automation.

The session will use concrete cross-jurisdiction regulatory journeys such as product labelling and testing, food standards, labour-related contributions, professional or cross-jurisdiction services, and selected local approvals to identify two or three feasible pilots. The purpose is to preserve the 'One Firm, Many Regulators' problem as the central frame while defining how the Technical Unit, Regulatory Registry and Business Portal can

support a credible process for diagnosing costly divergence, choosing the right coordination instrument and taking priority reforms from review to implementation. Specific objectives will include:

- Identifying the regulatory differences, hidden requirements and duplicate processes that impose the highest recurring costs or uncertainty on firms operating across provincial boundaries, while distinguishing justified variation from avoidable fragmentation.
- Establishing a practical criteria for reviewing regulatory quality and choosing between simplification, harmonisation, mutual recognition, regulatory equivalence, common minimum standards and joint administration while protecting legitimate safeguards and provincial autonomy.
- Recommending a credible federal-provincial pathway linking the Asaan Karobar Technical Unit, Pakistan Regulatory Registry and Pakistan Business Portal to priority pilots, institutional ownership, sequencing and measurable results.

The session will bring together representatives from provincial investment boards; the Cabinet Division and Ministry of Law and Justice; relevant food, labour, revenue, local government and digital regulatory authorities; chambers of commerce; and public interest stakeholders from consumer protection, labour, health and environmental regulation. Drawing on their institutional and practical experience, these subject experts and practitioners will examine the following questions:

- Which regulatory differences, hidden requirements and enforcement inconsistencies create the greatest recurring costs or uncertainty for firms, what evidence demonstrates those costs, and which differences remain justified by genuine provincial needs or public interest objectives?
- What common regulatory quality test should determine whether a requirement is necessary, legally grounded, proportionate, clear, predictable, enforceable and capable of delivering its stated outcome at reasonable cost - and when should governments use harmonisation, mutual recognition, regulatory equivalence, common minimum standards or joint administration?
- How should the Asaan Karobar Technical Unit and Pakistan Regulatory Registry map and review legacy regulation, scrutinise new proposals, convene competent federal and provincial regulators, resolve duplication and maintain an authoritative and current record of applicable requirements?
- How can the Pakistan Business Portal integrate federal and consenting provincial services without digitalising unnecessary steps or centralising lawful provincial functions, and what common data standards, service levels, decision records, safeguards and grievance or escalation routes are required?

- Which two or three cross-jurisdiction regulatory journeys should be piloted first, and how should quantified compliance cost, legal feasibility, reform readiness, effects on exporters and small or women-led firms, cross-provincial relevance and measurability inform their selection?

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