

Impact Evaluation Brief -  
Scotland Pakistan Scholarships for Young Women and Girls

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# A ten-year journey of impact: Assessing the reach and transformation of 20,000 Scottish scholarship beneficiaries in Pakistan



Since its inception in 2013, the Scotland Pakistan Scholarships for Young Women and Girls previously known as Scottish Scholarship Programme, through the support of Scottish government has successfully enabled over 20,000 female students from underprivileged backgrounds and communities to pursue education at both school (18000) and university levels (2000) in Pakistan. This evaluation study uses a mixed methods approach to gauge the impact of the program on girls' access to education and their potential integration into the labour market. Against the backdrop of persistent gender disparities and socio-economic barriers, the programme has emerged as a catalyst for change, enabling access to education and supporting long-term academic and professional growth. By addressing financial constraints and promoting inclusivity, it has created a ripple effect, empowering not only individual beneficiaries but also their families and communities.

This report delves into the multifaceted impact of the scholarship, examining its role in boosting enrolment and retention rates, alleviating financial pressures, enhancing self-confidence, and paving pathways to higher education and workforce participation. Through data-driven insights, it highlights how the programme has equipped beneficiaries with the tools to transcend systemic barriers and contribute to social progress.

### Program Highlights:

The Scottish Scholarship Programme between the years 2013 and 2024 provided scholarship support to 18,000 female students at the school level in Pakistan. Furthermore, in the same time period, the programme has also enabled 2000 university level female students in pursuing their higher education goals. The programme, given its inclusive nature, has also supported students from vulnerable backgrounds including religious minorities and persons with disabilities (PWDs) at both school and university levels, as shown in the infographic below.

### The extent of the impact:

 **18,000** Total school going children supported

**3,527** Minority Individuals at School Level

**93** Total PWDs (People with Disabilities) at School Level

 **2,000** Total university level girls supported

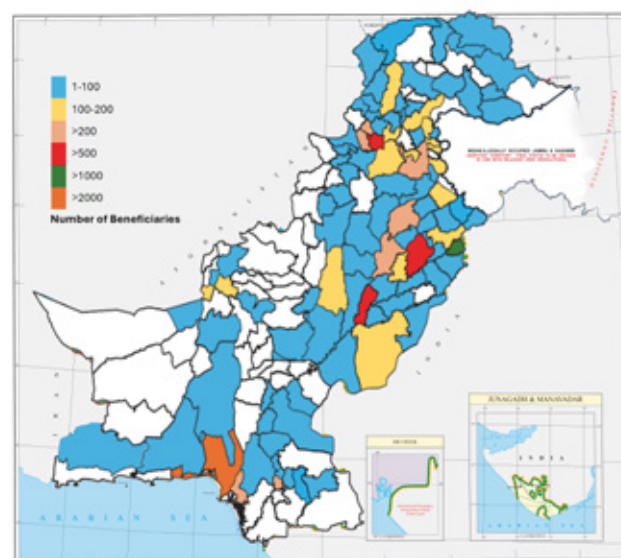
**283** Minority Individuals at University Level

**43** Total PWDs at University Level

The Scottish Scholarship Programme achieved impressive regional diversity, supporting girls from all administrative units of the country, including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan, as well as Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. By reaching both urban centres and remote rural areas, it addressed educational disparities and expanded access to underserved regions, promoting inclusion and bridging regional gaps in girls' education.

### The Regional Diversity of the Programme

District-wise programme reach across educational levels



## The Evaluation Process:

The evaluation of the Scottish Scholarship Programme utilised an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, combining quantitative survey data analysis with qualitative in-depth interviews, integrating diverse perspectives for a holistic understanding.

A representative sample of 854 beneficiaries across Pakistan, encompassing almost all administrative units that the program covered, was surveyed via Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interview (CATI) method, including 551 school-level parents and 303 university-level beneficiaries.

To deepen the analysis, qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews with 25 selected beneficiaries, enabling triangulation of findings. The final stage synthesised these results into actionable policy recommendations enhancing the programme's impact and effectiveness in achieving its goals.

### The evaluation process

- Step-1:** Background research
- Step-2:** Quantitative survey of 850+ beneficiaries
- Step-3:** Quantitative in-depth interviews of 25 beneficiaries
- Step-4:** Analysis and reporting
- Step-5:** Recommendations

## Findings:

### At School Level:

In Pakistan, 36% of the country's school-age population is out of school, with 53% being girls. The condition is even dire in rural areas where female literacy rate is already in straits<sup>1</sup>. The Scottish Scholarship Programme has been a pivotal intervention in promoting girls' education, significantly boosting enrolment and retention rates. The financial support provided by the scholarship has been a cornerstone of its impact. Among parents of school-level beneficiaries, **87% reported that the scholarship significantly alleviated financial pressures on their families, with 67% affirming that supporting their children's education would have been impossible without this intervention.**



# 67%

**Parents who would not have been able to support their child's education without the scholarship.**

When asked how they would have managed their children's education in the absence of the scholarship:

- **39%** stated their children would have had to **discontinue education altogether**.
- **34%** indicated they would have **resorted to loans** to cover educational expenses.
- **11%** said their children would have been **compelled to work part-time** to finance their studies.

The scholarship's targeted financial support addressed critical needs, covering transportation, books, and other educational materials to ensure uninterrupted learning. Many parents noted that it also allowed them to **reallocate funds to essential household expenses, easing their overall financial burden**. Additionally, some parents highlighted how **the programme reduced their reliance on loans**, mitigating long-term economic strain.

Beyond financial relief, the programme catalysed academic and personal growth among beneficiaries. An overwhelming **95% of parents observed significant improvements in their children's self-confidence**, a key indicator of empowerment and resilience. Similarly, **95% reported enhanced academic performance**, reflecting the programme's success in creating a supportive environment conducive to learning and personal development.

These findings assert the Scottish Scholarship Programme's dual impact—addressing financial barriers to education while promoting academic excellence and personal growth. It demonstrates a sustainable model of intervention that not only supports immediate educational needs but also equips beneficiaries with the confidence and skills essential for their future endeavours.

1. <https://mathsandscience.pk/publications/the-missing-third/>

### At University Level:

At the university level, the Scottish Scholarship proved to be a critical enabler of educational access and focus. **73% of beneficiaries** affirmed that they would not have been able to pursue their education without this financial support, highlighting the programme's role in overcoming economic barriers. Additionally, **49% indicated** they would have had to work part-time to fund their education in the absence of the scholarship. Notably, **77% of those already employed prior to receiving the scholarship were able to quit their jobs and dedicate themselves fully to their studies, thanks to the programme's support.**

Beyond financial relief, the scholarship had a significant psychological impact on recipients. Beneficiaries unanimously reported **enhanced self-confidence and motivation**, attributing this to the recognition of their merit through the scholarship. This validation not only reinforced their belief in their abilities but also ignited a determination to excel in their academic and professional pursuits, reflecting the transformative power of such initiatives. Beneficiaries also highlighted that the scholarship **reduced financial stress, enabled skill acquisition and career preparation**, and allowed them to **align their studies with career aspirations**, showcasing its multifaceted role in career development.

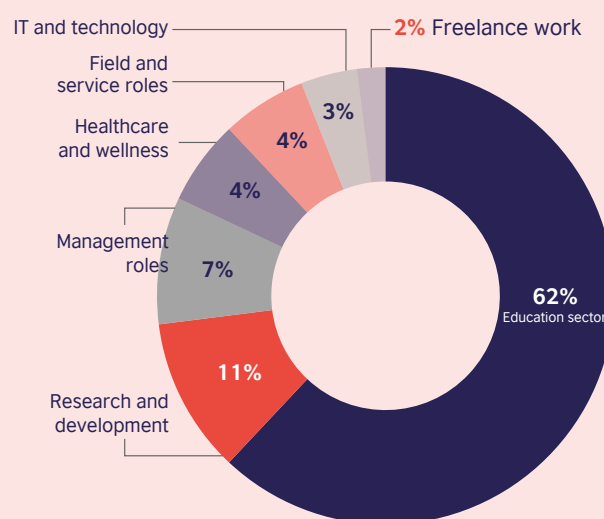
The Scottish Scholarship Programme has resultantly demonstrated a significant contribution in enhancing women's participation in Pakistan's labour force, where systemic barriers and societal norms often limit opportunities for women. According to UN Women, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women in Pakistan is just 21%, significantly lower than the global average of 39%. Nationally, the refined LFPR for women aged 15–64 is only 26%, compared to 84% for men, highlighting a substantial gender disparity in workforce involvement.<sup>2</sup> Among eligible beneficiaries (who are eligible for employment—and are not currently pursuing further studies), **50% have successfully secured employment**, reflecting the programme's effectiveness in facilitating workforce entry and empowering women to overcome traditional constraints. However, the remaining **50% who remain unemployed** indicating the need for sustained support to address structural challenges.



# 73%

**Beneficiaries who would not have been able to support their education without the scholarship.**

### Sectors where the beneficiaries are currently serving



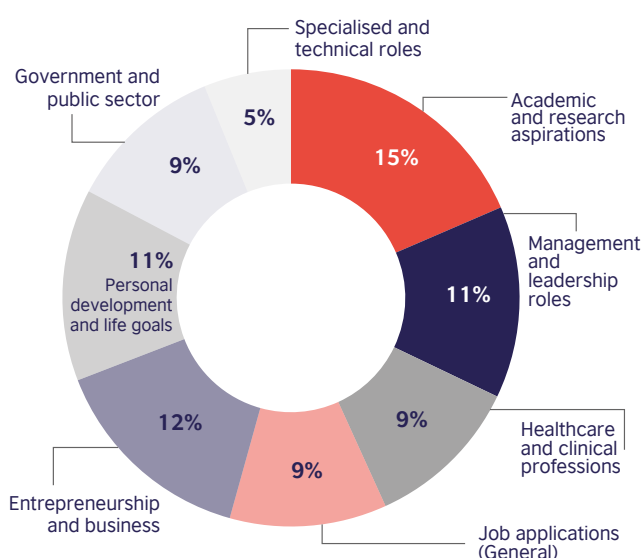
Employment outcomes further underline the programme's impact, with beneficiaries contributing significantly to socially critical sectors. The education sector employs **62%** of recipients, demonstrating their commitment to advancing learning in their communities. Others are making strides in **research and development (11%)**, **management and administration (7%)**, and **healthcare and wellness (4%)**, while a small fraction (**2%**) has ventured into freelance and online work.

Looking ahead, **15% of beneficiaries aspire to careers in academia and research**, **12% aim for entrepreneurship**, and **11% plan for leadership roles**, while **9% each envision contributing to the public sector and healthcare**. These ambitions reflect their readiness to contribute to driving Pakistan's socio-economic progress, building on the scholarship's impact.





#### Aspirations for future roles



The Scottish Scholarship Programme has catalysed a strong ripple effect, extending beyond individual beneficiaries to influence entire communities. 94% of respondents report being empowered to actively contribute to their communities, showcasing how education provided to girls generates widespread benefits.

 **94%**

**Beneficiaries who feel empowered to actively contribute to their communities.**

This impact is further amplified as 73% of beneficiaries mentor others, creating peer-driven support networks that enhance educational outcomes. Additionally, 38% promote awareness about girls' education, effectively challenging societal perceptions and inspiring change.

Advocacy efforts are notably strong, with 96% of respondents encouraging others to apply for the scholarship, positioning themselves as advocates for change. Beyond advocacy, a significant number of beneficiaries engage in volunteering, and contribute to community development, reinforcing the programme's influence on social progress. Collectively, these actions elevate educational attainment, promote gender equality, and drive long-term socio-economic advancement, underscoring the far-reaching impact of the scholarship.

# Few Inspiring Stories

Young women from diverse backgrounds have overcome immense challenges through the Scottish Scholarship Program, breaking barriers in education and personal growth. Their transformative journeys captured through some featured inspiring stories showcase the power of education to inspire, empower, and uplift communities.

*Note: To protect the privacy and identities of the scholarship beneficiaries, all names mentioned in the below stories have been intentionally altered.*

## Everything was discriminative, except for this scholarship

– A girl from a religious minority in a small town in Punjab.

Growing up in a small town in Punjab, a scholarship beneficiary faced financial hardships, initial familial reluctance, and the challenges associated with being part of a religious minority. Despite these barriers, she remained determined to pursue higher education, overcoming discrimination and societal pressures along the way. The Scottish Scholarship played a pivotal role in her journey, covering her financial needs and enabling her to complete a BS in Food Security and Agriculture. This support not only boosted her confidence but also opened doors to better career opportunities, culminating in her current role as a Project Ambassador at a reputed organisation. Her story highlights the far-reaching impact of educational support and her dedication to empowering others in her community to follow similar paths.

## From an embroidery worker to a qualified pharmacist: how the Scottish Scholarship changed the life of a girl from an underserved community in Balochistan

A beneficiary faced significant financial challenges growing up in a large family. Her father, a laborer earning a minimum wage, could barely meet the family's basic needs. Alongside other women in her family, she contributed to their income by doing traditional embroidery work. Despite these obstacles, she pursued her education with determination. Aspiring to become a doctor, she chose to study pharmacy after she was unable to secure admission to medical school. The Scottish Scholarship proved to be a turning point, providing crucial financial respite by covering her tuition fees and easing her financial burdens. This support allowed her to focus on her studies, boosting both her confidence and academic performance. She is now awaiting the clearance of her BS degree and plans to pursue an MPhil. She actively encourages others in her community to apply for scholarships, advocating for awareness sessions to help more students benefit from such opportunities. Her story highlights the transformative power of educational support and her commitment to empowering others.

## A farmer's daughter from the remote, rugged terrains of Gilgit who rose to become a gold medallist

A young woman from a remote district in the northern mountainous ranges of Gilgit-Baltistan has made an extraordinary journey, overcoming societal barriers and financial struggles to become a gold medallist and advocate for girls' education.

Growing up in a family of seven siblings with a father who worked as a farmer, she excelled in her studies, topping her matriculation exams despite limited resources and societal pressures against girls pursuing education. Her educational journey was supported by merit-based scholarships, providing much-needed financial relief at both the intermediate and bachelor levels. At the master's level, the Scottish Scholarship offered crucial support, allowing her to focus on her studies and achieve academic success, including earning a gold medal. After completing her degree, she paused her own academic aspirations to teach at a private school, ensuring her siblings could continue their education. Today, she empowers her students, advocates for scholarships, and exemplifies how education can transform lives and communities.

## From Humble Beginnings to Healing Hands: The Journey of Pride and Perseverance

– An Accomplished Nurse from Karachi

The journey of a young woman from a marginalized background to becoming a senior lecturer highlights the transformative power of educational support. Raised by parents with limited means, she initially pursued a diploma in nursing but soon recognised that higher education was essential to advance in her career. Facing financial challenges, particularly after her father's passing, she applied for the Scottish Scholarship. The scholarship proved to be a turning point, covering her tuition and providing a laptop—an essential tool during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this support, she completed her Master of Science in Nursing (MScN), returned as a nurse instructor, and ultimately secured a teaching position at a renowned university. Today, she advocates for scholarships and contributes to health projects in her community, demonstrating the profound impact of financial aid in empowering marginalized individuals.

## Breaking Barriers: The Journey of Resilience and Opportunity

– A Young Woman from a Small Town in Sindh

A deaf student from a remote town in Sindh, faced significant educational challenges due to the lack of local facilities. Her father, a primary school teacher, moved the family to a nearby city in search of better opportunities, eventually enrolling her in a Deaf School. The Scottish Scholarship covered essential expenses, alleviating the family's financial burden and enabling her to excel academically. Despite facing health issues, she thrived in the supportive school environment, becoming more confident and engaged. Now in 9th grade, she continues to pursue her education with determination, inspired by her father's dedication and the support of the scholarship.