

Impact Evaluation Country Report -
Scotland Pakistan Scholarships for Young Women and Girls

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



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Acknowledgements

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We are sincerely grateful to the Scottish Government for their generous support, which has enabled the Scotland Pakistan Scholarships for Young Women and Girls Programme to reach and empower over 20,000 women and girls across Pakistan. Their unwavering dedication to promoting girls' education and gender equality has played a pivotal role in ensuring the programme's success and lasting impact.

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Disclaimer: The interpretations offered in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Council, its officers, or those individuals who contributed to the research.

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Executive Summary

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.



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

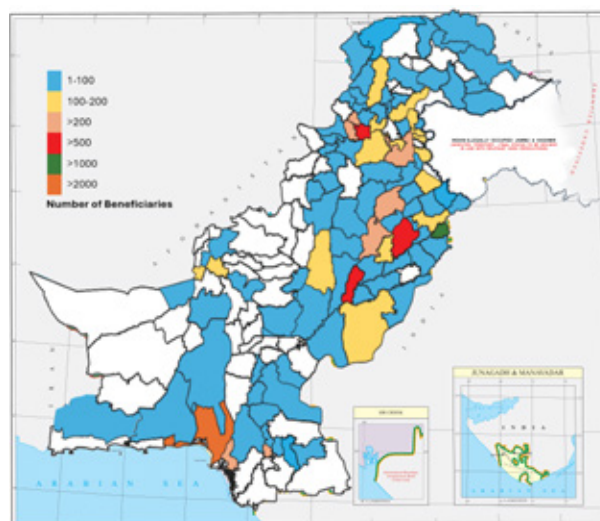
43

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.

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

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.

Findings

School level scholarships

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 straits¹. 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/>



73%

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

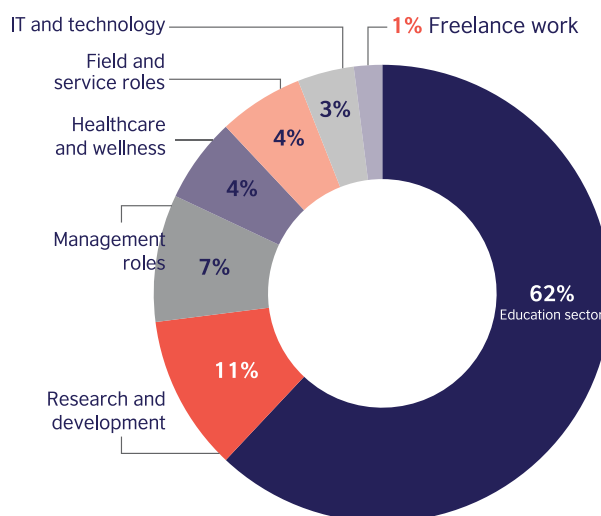
University level scholarships

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.

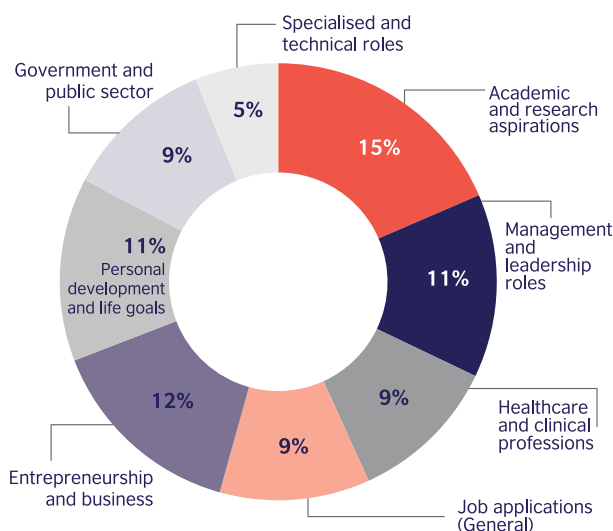
The Scottish Scholarship Programme has resultantly demonstrated a significant contribution in enhancing women's participation in Pakistan's labour force, where systemic barriers and societal norms often limit opportunities for women. According to UN Women, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for 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.² 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

Sectors where the beneficiaries are currently serving



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.

Aspirations for future roles



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**



Beneficiaries who feel empowered to actively contribute to their communities.

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.

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.

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.*

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

Kulsoom* 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, Kulsoom 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 Kulsoom 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. Kulsoom 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.

“Everything was discriminative, except for this scholarship” – a girl from a religious minority in a small town in Punjab.

Facing financial hardship, her father's initial reluctance, and the challenges of belonging to a religious minority, Saadia's relentless pursuit of education tells a story of resilience and

determination. Hailing from a small town in Punjab, she overcame significant barriers to pursue higher education, including initial resistance from her father and severe discrimination due to her religious minority status. With the support of the Scottish Scholarship, she completed her BS in Food Security and Agriculture. The scholarship not only alleviated her financial burdens but also boosted her confidence and career prospects, leading to her current role as a Project Ambassador at a prominent bank. Saadia's journey underscores the power of educational support and her commitment to inspiring and guiding others in her community to pursue higher education.

A farmer's daughter who became a gold medallist: Hafsa* from a remote, rugged terrain in Gilgit.

Hafsa's* remarkable journey, from a girl facing societal barriers and financial struggles in a remote district nestled in the northern mountainous ranges of Gilgit-Baltistan, to becoming a gold medalist and advocate for girls' education, is a testament to her resilience and the transformative power of educational support. Growing up in a family of seven siblings with a father who worked as a farmer, Hafsa excelled in her studies, topping her matriculation exams despite limited resources and societal pressure against girls pursuing education. Throughout her educational journey, she relied on merit-based scholarships, securing financial relief at both the intermediate and bachelor levels. At the master's level, Hafsa received the Scottish Scholarship, which eased her financial burdens and allowed her to fully focus on her studies. This support enabled her to achieve academic success, earning a gold medal, inspiring her community to value girls' education. After earning her degree, Hafsa chose to pause her further studies to teach at a private school, ensuring her siblings could continue their education. Today, she empowers her students, advocates for scholarships, and demonstrates the transformative power of education to change lives and communities.

From humble beginnings to healing hands: a nurse's journey of pride and perseverance – Bushra* from Karachi

Bushra's journey 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, Bushra 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, Bushra advocates for scholarships and contributes to health projects in her community, demonstrating the profound impact of financial aid in empowering marginalized individuals.

Breaking barriers: Zoobia's journey of resilience and opportunity – Zoobia from a small town in Sindh

Zoobia, 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 Zoobia to excel academically. Despite facing health issues, she thrived in the supportive school environment, becoming more confident and engaged. Now in 9th grade, Zoobia continues to pursue her education with determination, inspired by her father's dedication and the support of the scholarship.

Introduction

In 2013, the Scottish Government and the British Council started funding the Scottish Scholarship Programme in Pakistan. This programme aimed to make higher education more accessible for girls in underprivileged communities across Pakistan. The scholarships were provided in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics), Education, Sustainable Energy, Agriculture and Food Security, and Health Sciences. Since its inception, the programme has benefitted 20,000+ young girls and women including 18000+ students at secondary level of education and 2000+ at higher education levels, including those from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds in their school, master's, bachelors and PhD degrees.

The scholarship provides support at:

School Level:

1. Tuition fee, examination fee etc, and
2. In-kind support to children such as uniform, bags, books, stationery and shoes. (if applicable)

University Level:

1. Tuition fees for Master's/bachelor's courses in eligible fields
2. University Hostel Costs (when and where applicable)
3. Travel to and from home to university twice a year for students staying in on-campus hostels.

Objectives of the programme

The program aims to empower young girls and women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds by facilitating their access to higher education and providing the necessary support to help them realise their full potential. The core objective is to enable these individuals to pursue their academic aspirations, thereby enhancing their personal and professional trajectories. Beyond benefiting the scholarship recipients themselves, the program aims to generate broader community impact by supporting social and economic development at the grassroots level.

In collaboration with key educational institutions, the program works to eliminate barriers to education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. By increasing both enrolment and retention rates, the initiative seeks to ensure that girls not only gain access to education but also remain engaged and successful throughout their academic journey. The



overarching goal is to enable these women to enter the workforce, thereby promoting their socio-economic independence and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities.

This transformative initiative is designed to catalyse progress in girls' and women's education in Pakistan. Through this program over **20,000** young women and girls have benefitted from the Scotland Pakistan Scholarships across Pakistan. The scheme prioritizes inclusivity by reserving quotas for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority groups, and those with disabilities. Specifically, 20% minority and 20% disadvantaged quotas are allocated at the school level, while at the university level, 10% quotas are reserved for minorities and disabled students.

The project aims to make upper secondary and higher education more accessible to underprivileged girls across Pakistan by providing them with scholarships at secondary level (grades 8-12), undergraduate level (4-year BS) and Postgraduate (2-year master's degree).

The program's theory of change can be found in the [annexure](#).

Selection criteria for the scholarship

The Scottish Scholarship Programme funds education for Pakistani girls and women at both the school and university levels. Further details of the two strands are given below:

University level

The scholarship covers only women who are currently enrolled or intend to get admission in any HEC recognized university across Pakistan. The eligibility criteria ensure that the most deserving female

candidates are selected for the scholarship. The comprehensive criteria are three-fold:

- Academic performance,
- Financial need,
- Personal career ambition/ Interest in the field they are pursuing

Furthermore, the applications are shortlisted in the following three rounds.

Shortlisting rounds	Criteria
First Round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed application • Gender • Nationality • Relevance of field • Level of education applied for (bachelors, masters)
Second Round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of admission • Family income • CGPA
Third Round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of personal statements • Interviews conducted by university scholarship committees • Final selection based on interview scores

Standardised interview guidelines and evaluation criteria forms are provided to universities to ensure procedural compliance and transparency in candidate selection.

School level

As for the school level, the scholarship scheme is announced annually through 11 selected school partners. They are selected through expression of interest, which is open to all public and low-cost private schools. The selected partners are identified based on technical and infrastructural criteria which is given below.

Technical Criteria:

- Current enrolment rates
- Number of at-risk students
- Schools with minorities
- Schools with persons with disabilities

Functional Criteria:

- Areas where access to education was even more restricted
- Missing facilities
- Limited access to schools and resources
- Extremism, natural disasters, and overall high levels of poverty

The deserving students are selected by a school committee (Head Teacher, Head of organisation/ school and Parents). This scholarship covers tuition fee, examination fee etc, and in-kind support to children such as uniforms, bags, books, stationery and shoes (if applicable).

Research objectives

The objectives of this study vary, largely aimed to comprehensively evaluate the Scottish scholarship initiative in Pakistan while also delving into the examination of prevailing theory of change. Through this evaluative process, the programme sought to propose enhancements or modifications that are required.

The key focus areas that are central to this evaluation discuss different aspects of the programme's impact and effectiveness. These include:

Impact:

1. A critical examination of the scholarship's efficacy, particularly in its ability to **empower and support girls from financially disadvantaged backgrounds** to help them pursue education and achieve educational ambitions. This involves assessing the extent to which the scholarship programme addresses barriers to education and promotes equitable access for these marginalized groups.
2. Examining how programme graduates, with the support of the scholarship programme, **contribute to their communities**. This entails exploring how scholarship recipients leverage their education and skills to positively impact their communities, whether through employment, leadership roles, or other avenues of community development.

Effectiveness:

3. Identifying opportunities for enhancing the overall effectiveness and impact of the program.
 - i. Examining areas where the programme may be falling short and reducing barriers to education.
 - ii. Recognizing successful strategies that can be scaled up or replicated to maximise positive outcomes.

To meet the outlined objectives, a mixed-method approach was employed, covering both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative aspect involved conducting in-depth interviews with beneficiaries to understand the impact of scholarship on their lives. Meanwhile the quantitative aspect involved gathering data from beneficiaries through a detailed survey. This approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness and outcomes. The detailed methodology is explained in the chapter below.

Methodology

The evaluation of the Scottish Scholarship Programme utilised a mixed-method research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact, challenges, and opportunities, while capturing the experiences and perspectives of a diverse group of beneficiaries.

Quantitative survey:

The quantitative data was collected through a Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI) survey. This was conducted to collect structured data from beneficiaries across various scholarship strands and regions.

Sample size and target respondents

The total sample size for this activity was 850 beneficiaries. 551 parents of the scholarship beneficiaries at the school level were interviewed. Whereas, 303 university level scholarship beneficiaries were interviewed. A detailed explanation of sample size with respect to geographical coverage is explained below.

Geographical coverage

The survey sample ensured comprehensive geographic representation by including scholarship recipients from all administrative units of the country. The geographical breakdown of the sample is as such:

Design and parameters of the survey instruments

The survey targeted all programme participants, gathering information on their academic progress, socio-economic background, career aspirations, and the broader impact of the scholarship on their lives. The survey instruments included a combination of closed-ended and multiple-choice questions, ensuring that data would be analysed quantitatively while allowing for nuanced responses where necessary. This data collection method allowed the activity to gather insights from a broad sample of participants/beneficiaries, providing a solid statistical foundation for the analysis.

Qualitative in-depth interviews

To complement the quantitative data, 25 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with selected beneficiaries. These interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of personal experiences, challenges faced during the scholarship program, and the long-term impact on the beneficiaries' lives. The interviewees were carefully selected to ensure an even distribution across different scholarship strands and geographic regions, thus ensuring diverse perspectives. The detailed interviews followed a semi structured format, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific themes while ensuring that core questions were consistently addressed across all interviews. This qualitative data provided rich, detailed insights that enhanced the overall understanding of the programme's outcomes and beneficiaries' experiences.





Region	Total sample	School level (Interviews with parents)	University level (Interviews with beneficiaries)
Punjab	455	280	175
Sindh	79	43	36
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	151	110	41
Balochistan	94	79	15
Gilgit Baltistan	31	16	15
Pakistan Administered Kashmir	37	23	14

Region	Total sample	School level (Interviews with parents)	University level (Interviews with beneficiaries)
Punjab	8	1	7
Sindh	5	1	4
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	5	1	4
Baluchistan	4	1	3
Gilgit Baltistan	2	-	2
Pakistan Administered Kashmir	1	-	1
Total	25	4	23

Beneficiaries' Profile

In this section, we examine the pool of beneficiaries who have benefited from the Scottish Scholarship Programme, providing valuable insights into their profiles. We begin by analysing the entire group of beneficiaries to determine how many individuals received support at each grant level and to assess the regional distribution. For a deeper exploration of the beneficiary profiles, we utilised our survey data collected from a representative sample of the beneficiary population. By exploring this sample's distribution and demographic characteristics, we were able to get detailed, cross-sectional insights into the profiles of beneficiaries of the program.

Qualification level wise distribution

The Scottish Scholarship Programme, established in 2013, has benefited over 20,000 students across various educational levels in Pakistan over the past decade. From 2013 to 2024, the programme has provided essential support for educational expenses at primary, secondary, and higher education levels, including Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programmes. The following table details the total number of scholarships awarded each year at different educational levels, illustrating the programme's consistent impact.

Diversity of the beneficiaries

The program primarily targets girls and women, particularly those from financially disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable backgrounds. Over the years, it has successfully provided access to education for these individuals, helping to facilitate

their social mobility by offering them opportunities they might not otherwise have had. From the overall pool of beneficiaries, the following breakdown highlights the proportions of minority groups and persons with disabilities.



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



Scotland Pakistan Scholarships for Young Women and Girls

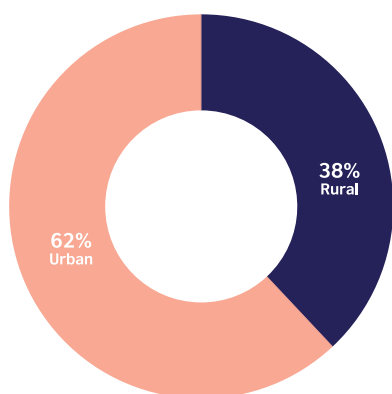
Total Awards - Year Wise

	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
BS						83	93	192	256	248	872
MS	81	103	210	170	195	73	76	104	206	164	1,382
PhD			6	6	6						18
School			1,982	2,000	2,000	2,152	2,731	2,250	3,359	2,240	18,714
Total	81	103	2,198	2,176	2,201	2,308	2,900	2,546	3,821	2,652	20,986

Urban-rural ratio

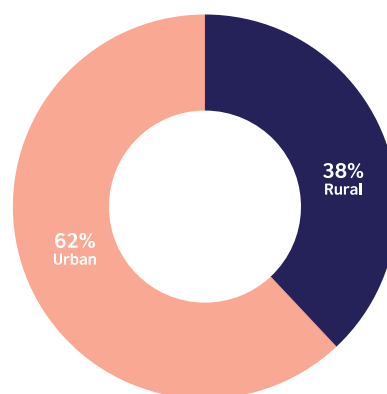
At the school level, a significant portion of the beneficiaries, 62%, come from urban areas, indicating a stronger presence of the scholarship program in cities and more developed regions. This may be attributed to better access to schools and greater awareness of the scholarship opportunities in urban centres. In contrast, 38% of the beneficiaries are from rural areas, reflecting the program's efforts to reach underserved populations. While urban students form the majority, the inclusion of students from rural areas demonstrates positive progress in reaching and supporting remote communities. However, considering that rural populations account for 64% of Pakistan's total population, there remains a need for enhanced outreach and support in these regions. Expanding efforts in rural areas would not only help the program better achieve its objective of supporting underprivileged and remote students but also ensure a more balanced representation in line with the country's population demographics.

Urban/rural distribution at school level



At the university level, in terms of rural and urban representation, a significant 69% of respondents come from urban areas, while 31% originate from rural backgrounds. This trend can be attributed to the challenges faced by rural students, particularly girls, in progressing to university-level education. The scholarship program has made noteworthy strides in supporting girls from rural areas, enabling them to travel to cities and pursue their education with financial assistance. Yet, this impact can be further enhanced to deliver on the intended outcome of particularly focusing on those hailing from rural and less advantaged background.

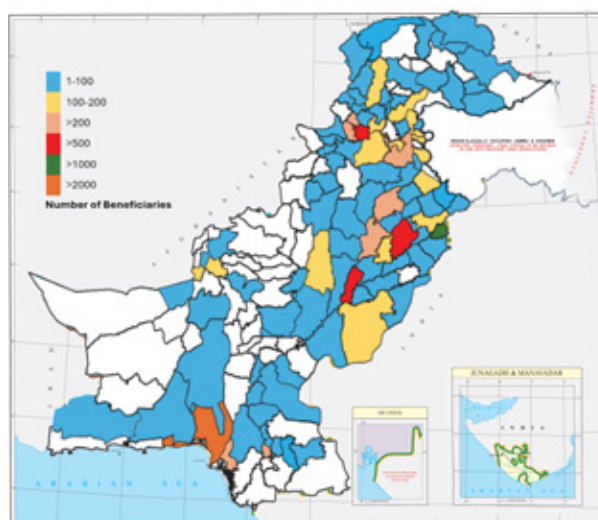
Urban/rural distribution at university level



Regional diversity

The Scottish scholarship program not only ensured diversity in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, urbanity, and education levels, but also achieved remarkable regional diversity. It reached girls across all four provinces of Pakistan—Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan—as well as the regions of Pakistan-administered Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). This broad geographical coverage highlights the program's commitment to making education accessible to girls from both urban centres and remote rural areas, where educational opportunities can be particularly scarce. The chart below illustrates this regional outreach, showcasing how the scholarship program impacted students from diverse localities across the country. By providing support to girls in underrepresented and underserved regions, the program is not only ensuring educational inclusion but also helping to address the regional disparities that often limit access to education for girls in Pakistan.

District-wise programme reach across educational levels



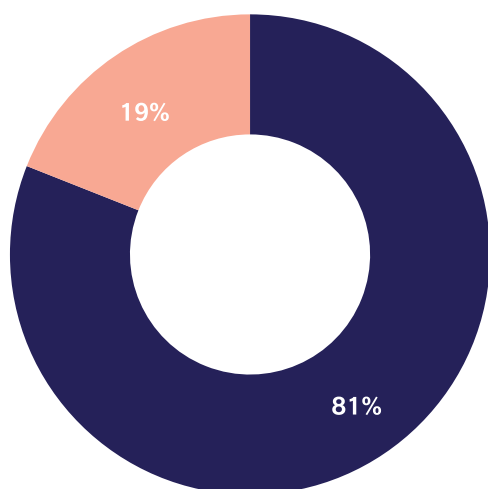
Findings

In this section, we present the key findings of our study, organized in alignment with the Theory of Change that underpins the scholarship program. According to the Theory of Change, the scholarship was designed to increase girls' enrolment and retention in education, provide better access to educational opportunities, and improve their participation in the Labor force. Importantly, the findings also address the broader impacts anticipated by the program, not only at the individual level but also at the community level, highlighting how the program has influenced societal dynamics beyond the direct beneficiaries.

Impact on Girls' Enrolment and Retention in Education
This section analyses the impact of scholarships on student enrolment and retention rates in schools and universities.

At the school level

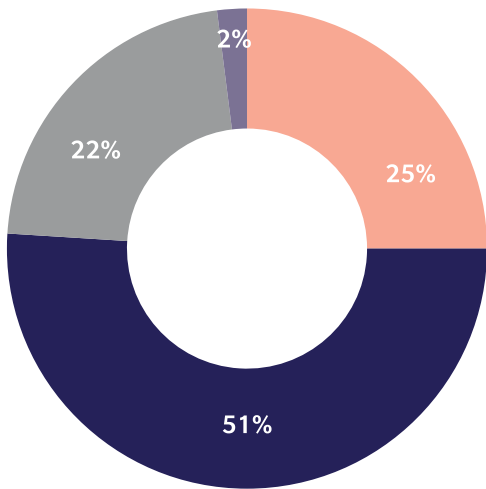
In terms of enrolment, the scholarship program not only directly supported over 18,000 beneficiaries, but also created a ripple effect within the wider community, encouraging many other girls and their families to pursue education. While the broader community impact will be discussed in dedicated sections below, here we focus on the retention of the scholarship beneficiaries themselves.



Enrollment status of the school level beneficiaries

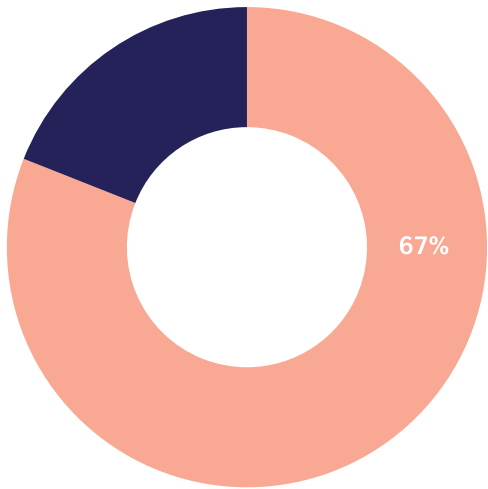


The survey reveals that 81% of school-level beneficiaries are still actively pursuing their studies, while 19% are no longer enrolled. Among the 81% who remain enrolled, 34% are currently in school and the remainder have advanced to higher levels of education. This reflects the programme’s role in enabling continued academic progression for girls. The 19% who are no longer enrolled have discontinued their studies at different stages: 26% dropped out after middle school, 54% after Matric, and 23% after completing Intermediate. This means that while the 81% are progressing in their academic journey, the 19% have either completed their education at the level they were at when they received the scholarship or left their studies at various stages.



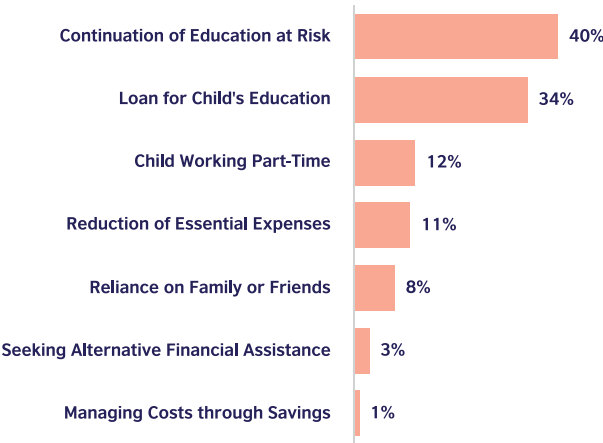
The highest level of education the beneficiaries who dropped out recieved

In the second category, the 19% of students who were not retained are more commonly from rural areas and lower socioeconomic backgrounds compared to their urban and higher-income counterparts. When parents were asked why their children discontinued their education, the most frequently cited reason was financial constraints, with 58% attributing it to lack of affordability. This indicates a need for sustained financial help to the beneficiaries, so they transition to higher educational levels in their academic pursuits and do not end up dropping out after the support from the program ends. Other reasons were family or marriage responsibilities, and transportation challenges, both accounting for 8% of the responses.



Parents who wouldn't have been able to support their child's education without the scholarship

The scholarship played a crucial role in both enrolling and retaining girls in schools. This is evident from the fact that **67% of parents reported they would not have been able to support their child's education without the scholarship**. The impact was even more pronounced in rural areas and lower socio-economic households, where the percentage of parents relying on the scholarship for their girls' education was significantly higher. This underscores the program's importance in breaking financial barriers and ensuring continued access to education for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Alternative ways to support child's education without the scottish scholarship program

The 67% respondents who reported that they were unable to support their child's education when asked what they would have done without the scholarship, **39%** of those said they would have simply discontinued their child's education. **34%** say they would have depended on taken loans. **11%** of children would have had to work part-time to support their education.

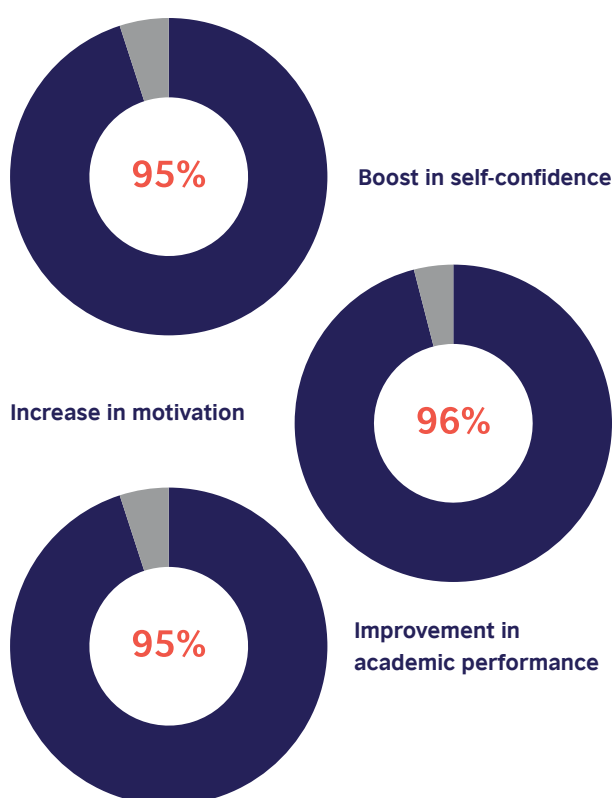
95% of parents reported that their children showed improved academic performance after receiving the scholarship. 96% and 95% reported increases in their children's motivation and confidence levels, respectively. Parents expressed that this motivation translated into children's desire to excel, and heightened interest in the studies:

“They now have a desire to excel”- Beneficiary's parent from Sindh

“She now studies with more passion, she's very motivated now.” -Beneficiary's parent from KPK

This means that the scholarship program not only provided financial support but also had a transformative effect on the overall development of the beneficiaries. The 95% of parents who reported improved academic performance highlight how the scholarship enabled students to focus on their studies without the burden of financial stress, potentially providing access to better learning materials, tutoring, or even the psychological reassurance that comes with financial stability.

Furthermore, **the significant increases in motivation (96%) and confidence (95%) suggest that the program did more than just facilitate access to education—it empowered the students.** The scholarship gave them a sense of accomplishment and belief in their abilities, fostering an environment where they could strive for success.



“After attending a Scottish university, I gained tremendous motivation and courage to pursue a career in research. This drive led me to start working on research papers, and I have been committed to this path ever since. Today, I am proud to be recognised as one of the top three researchers in my university. Much of this accomplishment is due to the opportunities provided by the scholarships I received.”

“I received a lot of encouragement, which has motivated me to work even harder for better grades and future scholarships. My goal is to support my parents and, in turn, help other medical students who can't afford an education. By doing so, I hope to inspire them to pursue their studies with determination.”



This boost in confidence and motivation is critical for long-term academic success, as it encourages students to set higher goals, stay committed to their studies, and engage more actively in their education. It also reflects the value these young girls began to see in themselves, which can lead to lasting personal and professional development well beyond their school years.

At the university level

A significant 75% of scholarship recipients reported they could not have continued their education without this support. Many shared similar challenges. For example, one girl from Sukkur explained,

“I couldn’t have continued my studies without the scholarship; even my brothers are not pursuing education right now because we can’t afford it.”

Another recipient from Kharmang, Baltistan, expressed a similar struggle:

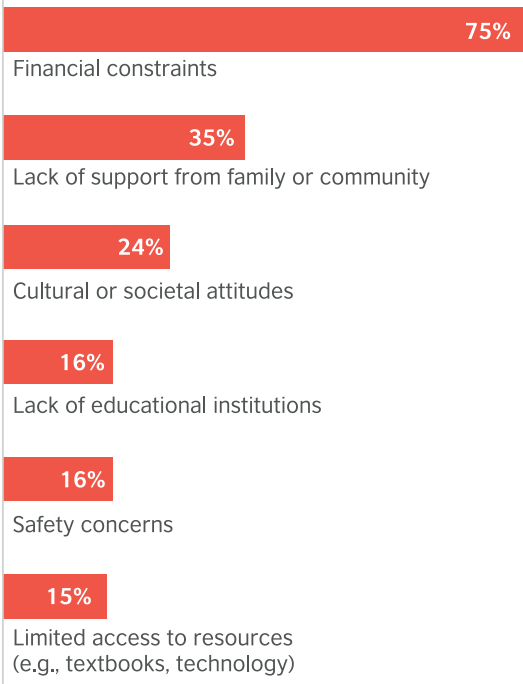
“My father prioritised my brother’s education over ours. He was studying at a private university, which made it difficult to finance education for three children. This scholarship made me independent.”



Enhanced access to education

To fully assess the program’s success in achieving this intended outcome, it is essential to first identify the barriers that hinder these girls’ access to education. We then explore whether and how the program has been effective in addressing and removing these obstacles.

Barriers to Girls' Education in Beneficiaries' Communities



How the program helped overcome the financial constraints?

The Scottish Scholarship Programme has played a pivotal role in dismantling the barriers that Pakistani girls and women face in accessing education, with financial constraints being the most significant obstacle. Historically, these constraints have disproportionately affected females, often relegating them to the status of a financial burden within families. This scholarship programme has been instrumental in altering this perception and providing much-needed relief.

Through interviews with beneficiaries, a recurring theme emerged: the scholarship alleviated the financial pressures that families faced, making education a feasible option for their daughters. Many girls expressed that, prior to receiving the scholarship, they were considered a financial strain, which often resulted in their education being deprioritized. The financial support from the scholarship meant that parents no longer viewed their daughters’ education as an unaffordable luxury, but rather as a viable and valuable investment.

“This scholarship paid for all my expenses, including the high tuition fee and my transportation costs to and from Faisalabad and Gojra, because I was a hostelite. Therefore, my parents were not burdened anymore by my schooling...”

Moreover, the scholarship has provided stability for many girls who would otherwise have had to abandon their studies due to financial hardships. Several beneficiaries shared anecdotes of peers who had to leave school midway because of economic pressures, a fate they were able to avoid thanks to the Scottish Scholarship. This financial security has not only enabled them to continue their education uninterrupted but has also empowered them with the confidence to pursue their academic and career aspirations.

“I applied (for the scholarship) so that there aren't any hurdles in my education... Some of my peers had to leave in the middle, I might have been one of them too, I am only able to continue because of the scholarship”

Numerous extracts from interviews with parents and beneficiaries underscore the profound impact of alleviating financial burdens. They often describe the scholarship as a significant relief, emphasizing the peace of mind it provided. Such testimonials highlight the transformative role of the scholarship in fostering an environment where girls can thrive academically without the looming threat of financial barriers.

How the programme helped with conveyance-related barriers?

In addition to alleviating financial constraints, the Scottish Scholarship Programme has addressed access-related barriers, notably transportation, which many girls identified as a significant hurdle in their educational journey. With tuition fees covered by the scholarship, families have been able to allocate resources toward transportation arrangements. This has allowed students to attend schools and universities that were previously inaccessible due to distance and travel costs, thereby broadening their educational opportunities and ensuring that logistical challenges do not impede their academic progress.

“We (My family) didn't have a car or bike- transport was an issue- I used to travel in a van, and the van fee was also quite high, once i got the scholarship for my tuition fee, only then i was able to comfortably pay my van fee as well.”

While the Scottish Scholarship Programme has enabled many families to manage transportation costs, for numerous students, this remains a significant challenge. The issue is particularly pressing for those who must commute daily to attend university. Many beneficiaries have highlighted transportation as an ongoing barrier, underscoring the need for additional support in this area. There have been frequent requests to extend the scholarship to include transportation expenses, recognizing that such support would further alleviate the burden and ensure that students can fully access their educational opportunities without logistical hindrances.

“They should also include the expenses of transport. As I need to come from the city, so I have to pay 7k for the transport. So, for those students who can't afford the charges for transport, it would be difficult for them to continue the studies. So, they (Scottish scholarship programme) should cover the expense of it as well”

“In my community, A lot of girls go to school, but the school is only up till 8th grade, after that for 9th they must go to the city... and there are issues which leads to them not going to the 9th grade school. The boys- they go out on their bikes, for girls, that (transport) remains the issue. ...there are girls who can't even afford education, they are eager to study but because they don't have money to travel to the city...they drop out...”

How the programme changed community attitudes?

The Scottish Scholarship Programme has not only facilitated educational opportunities for girls but has also significantly enhanced their social status within their communities. Many beneficiaries shared that, prior to receiving the scholarship, their voices were often unheard within their families, and their opinions were not given due consideration. However, the scholarship has been a catalyst for change, elevating their importance and influence in family decisions. As these girls pursue their education and achieve academic success, they have gained respect and recognition, transforming societal perceptions and reinforcing the value of their contributions both at home and in broader society.

“People start looking at you in a way that you have achieved something otherwise no matter how much you are intelligent, people take you for granted.”

This empowerment through education has not only enriched their personal development but has also fostered a more inclusive and equitable environment within their communities.

“It has impacted me enormously, it has given me confidence and motivation and I feel proud of myself, it has also changed the mindset of the people around me, and my social circle now views me differently...”

“...they (my community people) now do listen what I say, like... when they want some advice for their children’s education ... they respectfully ask for a guideline...”

“...people pay attention to what I have to say, my ideas are considered worthy, and many take my suggestions for career counselling, and I give ideas in their educational journey...”

Additionally, in our chart above, 35% of respondents reported a lack of support from either their families or the broader community. This absence of encouragement can severely diminish a girl’s

opportunity to pursue education, reflecting deep-seated societal norms that undervalue girls’ education. A girl from Faisalabad exclaimed while talking about her struggle to convince her family:

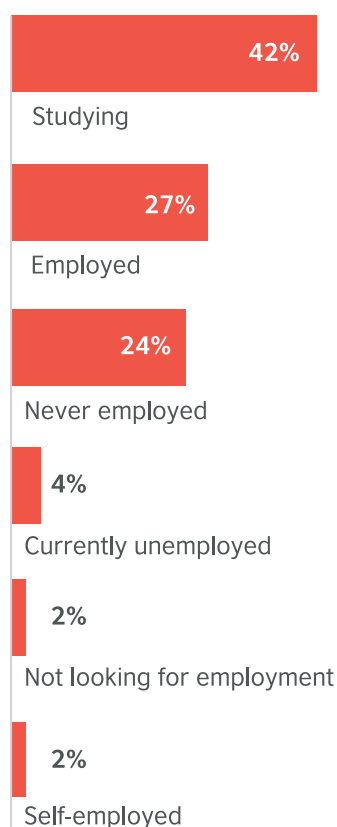
“It is getting better with time but it wasn’t satisfactory during the time I started my journey, I wasted 2 years after finishing college only to convince my parents to allow me to join University, they weren’t willing, my father finally gave in but told me that I’d get no financial support from him, that too didn’t budge my motivation to study, I applied for my degree program and I was given admission in the University of Agriculture...”

Empowering women’s workforce participation

In Pakistan, societal norms often restrict girls to domestic roles, limiting their active participation in the labour force even after acquiring an education. 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.³ To assess the impact of the Scottish Scholarship Program in improving the participation of women in the workforce, we asked our university-level recipients about their employment status. The findings, illustrated in the chart below, offer valuable insights into their current professional status. 27% of the overall sample of beneficiaries (including both students and graduates) are currently employed. 24% were never professionally engaged or employed. 4% are those who are currently in between jobs or have worked in the past and are presently unemployed. These statistics reveal the extent to which these educated women have been able to break through traditional barriers and engage in the workforce, highlighting both progress and areas where further support may be needed to promote gender equality in employment.

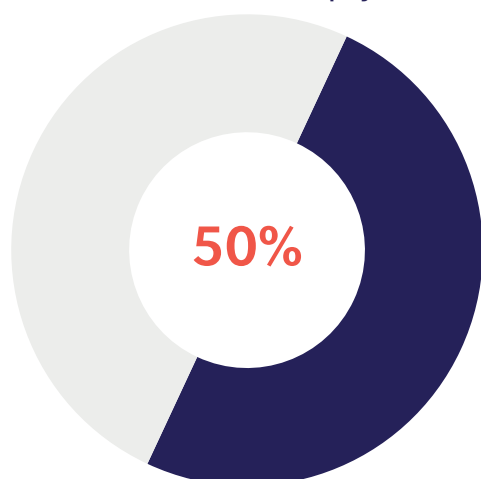
3. National report on the status of women in Pakistan, 2023

Employment Status of the Beneficiares



Upon further analysis of the employment statistics, focusing specifically on those beneficiaries who have graduated and are not currently pursuing further studies—we find that the Scottish Scholarship Programme has successfully facilitated employment for 50% of the graduated recipients. This indicates a significant achievement in enabling half of these educated women to secure positions in the workforce. However, it also highlights a critical area for improvement, as the remaining 50% of eligible beneficiaries remain unemployed with only 3% of these not looking for employment. These figures underscore the ongoing challenges and opportunities in enhancing employment prospects for women,

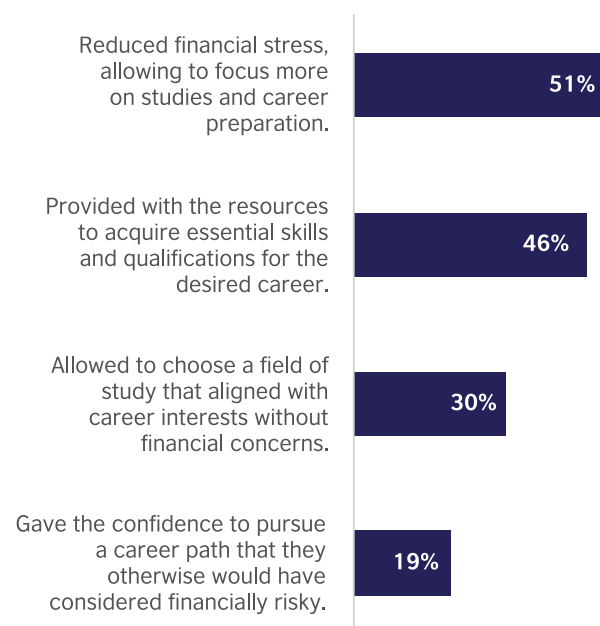
Graduated beneficiaries who are employed



emphasizing the need for continued support and initiatives to bridge this gap and promote greater workforce participation among educated women.

When asked how the scholarship supported their career development, recipients highlighted multiple areas of impact. **51% of respondents** indicated that the scholarship significantly reduced financial stress, allowing them to focus on their studies and career preparation which involves enhancing academic performance, developing relevant skills, and exploring various career paths. Additionally, **46% reported** that the scholarship equipped them with resources to acquire critical skills and qualifications necessary for their chosen careers. **30% shared** that the financial support enabled them to pursue a field of study closely aligned with their career interests, free from financial constraints. Finally, **19% noted** that the scholarship instilled confidence to pursue career paths that they might have previously considered financially risky.

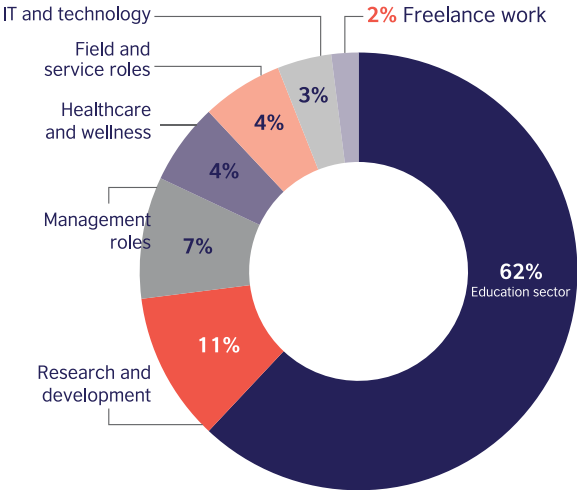
The ways in which the scholarship enabled the beneficiaries to pursue a career they wanted to take up



To further understand how the scholarship has contributed to Labor force participation, we asked employed beneficiaries about their current occupations and students about their future career aspirations. The employment distribution of scholarship recipients reveals a strong inclination towards the education sector, with 62% of individuals currently working in this field demonstrating their commitment to furthering the cause of education. 11% of beneficiaries are engaged in Research and Development, indicating a commitment to advancing knowledge and innovation in various fields. Furthermore, 7% of scholarship beneficiaries work in Management and Administration, suggesting that they are stepping into roles that require leadership

and organizational skills. 4% of recipients have chosen careers in Healthcare and Wellness, contributing to an essential sector that directly impacts public health and quality of life. Their involvement in healthcare reflects a dedication to service and the well-being of their communities. Lastly, a small fraction of beneficiaries—2%—has ventured into Freelance and Online Work. This emerging trend highlights the adaptability of graduates in an increasingly digital world, where flexible work arrangements and independent contracting are becoming more prevalent. By engaging in freelance work, these individuals can leverage their skills while also exploring entrepreneurial opportunities, further expanding their career horizons.

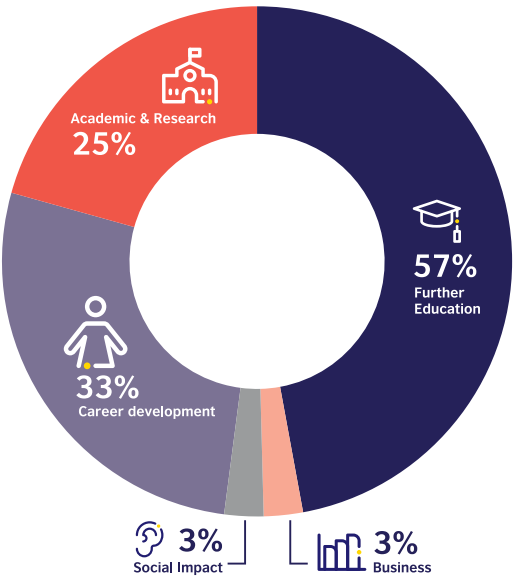
Sectors where the beneficiaries are currently serving



The following chart represents the career aspirations of the beneficiaries who are pursuing their education. Majority of the students (57%) aspire to pursue further education. Almost one third (33%) are looking to venture into professional life and aspire for career development. 25% beneficiaries expressed commitment to make their way through research endeavours by taking up roles in academia. Furthermore, a small fraction (3%) of students aims for entrepreneurial careers and business development opportunities. Another 3% are dedicated to their social and community impact vision and would work for social welfare post-graduation.

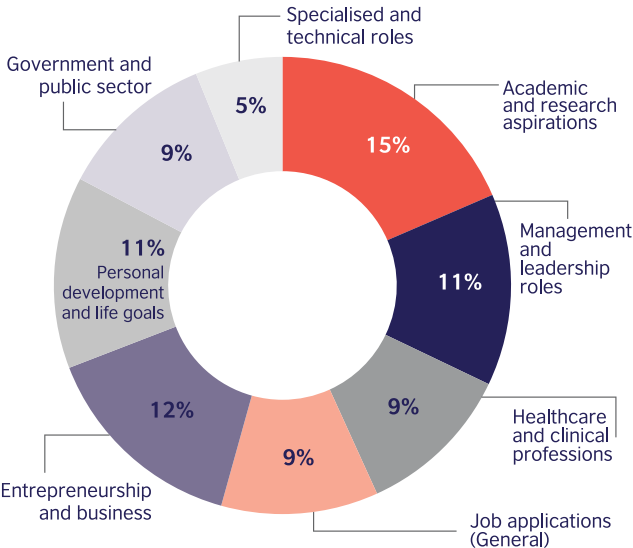
To gain insight into the long-term impact of the scholarship program on its beneficiaries, respondents were asked to articulate where they envision themselves in the next five years. The responses reveal a diverse array of ambitions, reflecting their varied career interests and life goals. A notable 15% of respondents expressed aspirations in academic and research fields, indicating a strong commitment to furthering their education and serving in the academic sector. Entrepreneurship and business

Post graduation aspiration of the beneficiaries



ambitions follow closely at 12%, highlighting a desire among some beneficiaries to create their own ventures and undertake entrepreneurial initiatives. Additionally, 11% aim for management and leadership roles. Personal development and life goals, also at 11%, underline the importance of holistic growth beyond professional achievements. The healthcare and clinical professions represent 9% of responses, pointing to a commitment to service in vital sectors. Similarly, aspirations in the government and public sector, as well as general job aspirations, each garnered 9%, reflecting a desire to contribute to society through various institutional roles. Finally, specialized and technical roles attracted 5% of respondents, indicating an interest in developing niche skills within specific industries.

Aspirations for future roles



Community-level outcome

The Scottish Scholarship program has not only facilitated access to education for girls but has also generated a transformative impact within their communities. This section explores the community-wide ripple effect of the program, alongside the ongoing challenges and barriers that affect broader support for girls' education.

 **76%**

**The Support For Girls' Education
in Beneficiaries' Communities**

Data shows that 76% of respondents believe that girls' education is supported in their communities. This indicates a strong foundation of encouragement for educational opportunities. However, 24% of respondents report facing significant barriers that prevent girls from fully accessing education. The Scottish Scholarship program has sparked a profound community-wide impact through a ripple effect that extends beyond the immediate beneficiaries. As financial assistance empowers girls to pursue their education, it simultaneously creates a sense of responsibility and community engagement.

An overwhelming 94% of the respondents reported that the scholarship enabled them to contribute to their communities. This response illustrates how the benefits of education, once provided to the girls, radiate outward, impacting the broader community in tangible ways.

Among these beneficiaries, 73% are actively mentoring others, sharing their knowledge and experiences to uplift those around them. This peer-driven support system strengthens educational outcomes and ensures that the scholarship's advantages are multiplied.



 **94%**

**The Scottish Scholarship has
enabled me to contribute to my
community**

Dr. Saman, who went to Scotland to pursue her PhD on scholarship shared her experience as follows:

I was able to guide many of my students. I was able to compare the education system of Scotland and Pakistan. I had the opportunity to meet the Mayor of Glasgow. I invited him to Pakistan but due to Covid situation he couldn't come. Otherwise, he agreed to come to my university where I was teaching, But he gave me an online session for students, we arranged a Webinar, and he also gave me an interview which you can find on YouTube as well

Additionally, 38% of respondents are actively promoting awareness about girls' education. Their advocacy serves as a vital channel for changing societal perceptions and encouraging more families to prioritize education for girls.

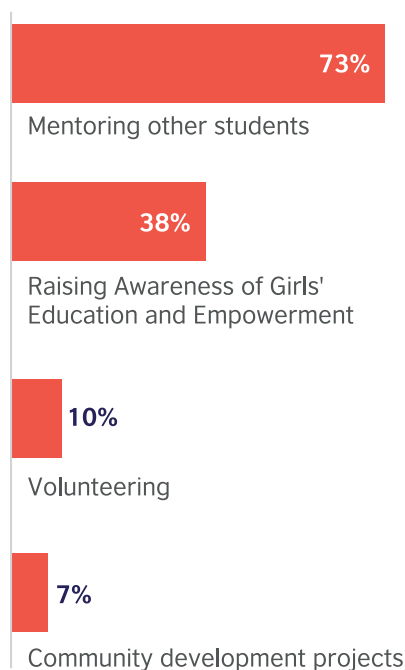
Faiza from Faisalabad shares her activism in following words:

I was part of an online academy where I was teaching and I joined it to earn money on the side to cover my basic expenses, I encouraged all the females in that academy to pursue higher education and give it importance, the academy then requested me to give counselling sessions to students and to parents, they told me to guide parents and students both on program applying options and on application processes.

Furthermore, 10% of the beneficiaries are engaged in volunteering activities while 7% have contributed to community development in some way.



The ways in which Scottish Scholarship enabled the beneficiaries to contribute to their communities



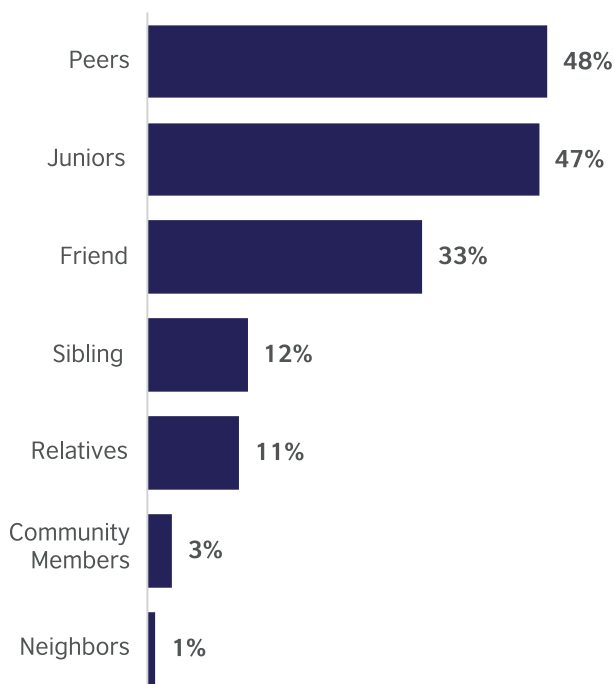
Moreover, a significant 96% of these recipients reported that they advocate for others to apply for the scholarship, underscoring their role as ambassadors for educational opportunity. This advocacy is directed toward a broad audience, including peers, juniors, friends, siblings, relatives, and other community members. By sharing their positive experiences and the tangible benefits they've gained, these beneficiaries inspire and motivate others to pursue similar educational paths. This ripple effect not only amplifies the reach of the scholarship programme but also fosters a supportive network that champions education and gender equality. As more girls become aware of and apply for such opportunities, the collective educational attainment of the community is elevated, contributing to long-term social and economic development.

 **96%**

Beneficiaries' who encouraged others to apply for the scholarship

Respondents were asked if they encouraged anyone to apply for the Scottish scholarship, and 96% reported that they had encouraged others to apply.

People who the beneficiaries encouraged to apply



Inspiring Stories

In this section, we share some selected inspirational journeys of young women whose lives have been transformed through the Scottish Scholarship Program. These remarkable girls, hailing from diverse backgrounds, have faced and overcome significant challenges—social, economic, and gender-related. Through the opportunities provided by the scholarship, they have not only broken barriers in education and personal growth but have also emerged as shining stars within their communities. Their stories stand as a testament to the power of education and opportunity in reshaping futures, empowering them to lead, inspire, and uplift others in society.

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

***“Everything was discriminative, except for this scholarship”
– a girl from a religious minority in a small town in Punjab.***



Facing financial hardship, her father's initial reluctance, and the challenges of belonging to a religious minority, Saadia's relentless pursuit of education tells a story of resilience and determination. Hailing from a small town in Punjab, she overcame significant barriers to pursue higher education, including initial resistance from her father and severe discrimination due to her religious minority status. With the support of the Scottish Scholarship, she completed her BS in Food Security and Agriculture. The scholarship not only alleviated her financial burdens but also boosted her confidence and career prospects, leading to her current role as a Project Ambassador at a prominent bank. Saadia's journey underscores the power of educational support and her commitment to inspiring and guiding others in her community to pursue higher education.

Saadia's journey is a compelling story of perseverance, ambition, and the transformative impact of educational support. Hailing from a small town in Punjab, a region where higher education for girls is often discouraged, Saadia faced significant challenges in her pursuit of education. Her father, who manages student accounts at a private institute, was initially reluctant to support her higher education. It took Saadia two years of persistent effort to convince him to allow her to attend university, albeit without financial support. In her own words:

“I wasted 2 years after finishing college only to convince my parents to allow me to join University, they weren't willing, my father finally gave in but told me that I'd get no financial support from him, that too didn't budge my motivation to study, I applied for my degree program and I was given admission in the University”

Despite these hurdles, Saadia's determination never wavered. She enrolled in the university to pursue a BS in Food Security and Agriculture. Living in a hostel, she navigated her academic journey with limited resources. The turning point came in 2021 when she secured a Scottish Scholarship, which

alleviated her financial burdens and enabled her to focus on her studies.

Saadia's academic journey was not without its struggles. As a member of a religious minority, she faced significant discrimination and hostility, both in her hostel and at the university. This discrimination was so severe that it led her to decide against rejoining the university for further studies. Despite these challenges, Saadia remained resilient and continued to excel academically. While sharing about the discriminatory behaviour she faced based on her minority identity, she praised the Scottish Scholarship Program for its inclusion and equitable support for all. She exclaimed:

(.....) this British council program doesn't really care about what religion you belong to, the only thing that matters is your profile, your academic background and your future objectives.

The Scottish Scholarship played a crucial role in Saadia's success. It not only provided financial support but also boosted her confidence and added significant value to her CV. The scholarship's prestige and the association with the Scottish government gave her a sense of pride and motivation. Saadia's academic achievements and the scholarship's support enabled her to secure a job at a prominent bank, where she works as a Project Ambassador.

Saadia's story is also marked by her efforts to inspire and support others. She has encouraged her younger sisters and friends to pursue higher education and apply for scholarships. Her youngest sister, in particular, is keen on education, and Saadia is actively supporting her aspirations. Saadia has also been involved in teaching and counselling at an online academy, where she motivates other females to prioritize education and guides them through the application processes for various programs.

Despite the challenges she faced, Saadia's journey is a powerful example of how educational support can transform lives. Her story underscores the importance of scholarships in enabling students from marginalized communities to overcome barriers and achieve their goals. Saadia's resilience, determination, and commitment to education serve as an inspiration to many, highlighting the profound impact that financial aid and support can have on individuals and their communities.

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



Kulsoom faced significant financial challenges growing up in a large family. Her father, a labourer earning a minimum wage, could barely meet the family's basic needs. Alongside other women in her family, Kulsoom 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 Kulsoom 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. Kulsoom 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.*

Growing up in a large family with limited financial resources, Kulsoom's father, a labourer, struggled to support the education of his seven children. Despite these challenges, Kulsoom was determined to pursue her dreams.

Kulsoom's early education took place in a small village in Baluchistan, where educational opportunities were scarce. It was only in recent years that significant changes occurred, with the opening of colleges and the introduction of bus services, making education more accessible for girls. This shift in the educational landscape allowed Kulsoom to continue her studies beyond the basic levels available in her village.

To support her education and contribute to her family's income, Kulsoom engaged in traditional Balochi embroidery work, a skill passed down from her mother. This work, though time-consuming, provided a crucial financial lifeline for her family. Despite the financial strain, Kulsoom's passion for education never wavered.

Kulsoom's aspiration to become a doctor was thwarted by the high admission requirements, leading her to choose pharmacy as her field of study. Her determination to excel in this field was fuelled by a personal tragedy: the loss of a friend due to a medical error. This incident deepened her resolve to become a hospital pharmacist and ensure that such mistakes do not happen to others.

The turning point in Kulsoom's educational journey came when she learned about the Scottish Scholarship from the British Council through a friend's father. Encouraged by her friends, Kulsoom applied for the scholarship during the COVID-19 pandemic. The application process was straightforward, involving the submission of a paragraph and personal details. Despite initial doubts, Kulsoom was selected for the scholarship, which covered her tuition fees and significantly eased her financial burdens.

The scholarship had a profound impact on Kulsoom's life. It not only alleviated the financial stress of paying for her education but also boosted her confidence and motivation. With the scholarship's support, Kulsoom could focus on her studies without the constant worry of tuition fees. This financial relief allowed her to excel academically and provided her with the peace of mind to support her siblings' education as well.

Kulsoom's success inspired her to inform and encourage her juniors and peers about the scholarship opportunities available. She emphasized the importance of awareness sessions in universities to ensure that more students, especially girls from marginalized communities, could benefit from such programs. Kulsoom's advocacy for education extended beyond her own achievements, as she sought to empower others in her community to pursue their educational goals.

Currently, Kulsoom is awaiting the clearance of her BS degree in pharmacy and plans to continue her studies by pursuing an MPhil. Her journey is a testament to the transformative power of educational support and the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity. Kulsoom's story highlights the critical role that scholarships play in enabling students from underprivileged backgrounds to achieve their dreams and contribute positively to their communities.

A farmer's daughter who became a gold medallist: Hafsa* from a remote, rugged terrain in Gilgit.

Hafsa's remarkable journey, from a girl facing societal barriers and financial struggles in a remote district nestled in the northern mountainous ranges of Gilgit-Baltistan, to becoming a gold medallist and advocate for girls' education, is a testament to her resilience and the transformative power of educational support. Growing up in a family of seven siblings with a father who worked as a farmer, Hafsa excelled in her studies, topping her matriculation exams despite limited resources and societal pressure against girls pursuing education. Throughout her educational journey, she relied on merit-based scholarships, securing financial relief at both the intermediate and bachelor levels. At the master's level, Hafsa received the Scottish Scholarship, which eased her financial burdens and allowed her to fully focus on her studies. This support enabled her to achieve academic success, earning a gold medal, inspiring her community to value girls' education. After earning her degree, Hafsa chose to pause her further studies to teach at a private school, ensuring her siblings could continue their education. Today, she empowers her students, advocates for scholarships, and demonstrates the transformative power of education to change lives and communities.*

Hailing from the serene yet challenging landscapes of a distant district of Gilgit-Baltistan, Hafsa's early life was marked by the challenges of growing up in a region where educational opportunities were limited, especially for girls. Born into a family of seven siblings, with her father working as a farmer,



Hafsa faced the daunting reality of limited financial resources. Education, a luxury for many in her community, was often overshadowed by the pressing need for immediate work and support for the family.

From a young age, Hafsa exhibited a remarkable aptitude for learning. She topped her matriculation exams, a feat that not only filled her with pride but also ignited a passion for education that would guide her through the trials ahead. However, her aspirations were met with resistance. In a community where traditional views often prioritized boys' education over girls', Hafsa's parents faced criticism for allowing their daughter to pursue higher studies. Despite the societal pressures and negative comments, her parents stood firm, believing in Hafsa's potential and the transformative power of education.

As Hafsa transitioned to higher education, the financial burden became increasingly heavy. With her siblings also in school, the family's resources were stretched thin. It was during this critical juncture that the Scottish scholarship emerged as a beacon of hope. Awarded to her after her first semester of master's studies, the scholarship alleviated her financial worries, covering tuition fees for two semesters. This support not only eased the strain on her family but also allowed Hafsa to focus on her studies without the constant worry of how to pay for her education.

The scholarship was more than just financial assistance; it was a catalyst for change. With renewed confidence, Hafsa excelled in her studies, ultimately becoming a gold medalist. This achievement not only brought joy to her family but also shifted the perception of girls' education in her community. As news of her success spread, it inspired other families to reconsider their views on educating daughters. Hafsa's journey became a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of supporting girls in their pursuit of knowledge.

However, as Hafsa's academic journey progressed, she faced another significant challenge. After completing her master's degree, her parents encouraged her to continue her education with an MPhil. Yet, Hafsa made the difficult decision to pause her studies to support her siblings' education. Understanding the financial constraints her family faced, she chose to teach at a private school, ensuring that her younger siblings could continue their schooling. This selfless act demonstrated her commitment not only to her own education but also to the future of her family.

Hafsa's story did not end with her academic achievements. In her role as a teacher, she now imparts knowledge to the next generation. Her experiences have equipped her with the understanding that education is not merely a personal triumph but a communal responsibility. She actively encourages her students, especially girls, to pursue their dreams, emphasizing that education can break the cycle of poverty and open doors to new opportunities.

Reflecting on her journey, Hafsa acknowledges the profound impact of the Scottish scholarship. It not only provided financial relief but also instilled a sense of purpose and determination within her. She recognizes that her success is intertwined with the support she received and is committed to maximizing the benefits of such programs for future generations. Hafsa advocates for increased awareness and accessibility of scholarships, believing that with the right support, many more girls from underprivileged backgrounds can achieve their dreams.

In a world where challenges often seem insurmountable, Hafsa's story stands as a powerful reminder of resilience, hope, and the transformative power of education. Through her journey, she has not only changed her own life but has also become a beacon of inspiration for countless others, proving that with determination and support, anything is possible.

From humble beginnings to healing hands: a nurse's journey of pride and perseverance – Bushra* from Karachi



Bushra's journey 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, Bushra 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, Bushra advocates for scholarships and contributes to health projects in her community, demonstrating the profound impact of financial aid in empowering marginalized individuals.

Bushra's journey is a compelling narrative of resilience, ambition, and the transformative power of educational support. Born into a marginalized family, both of her parents worked as janitors in a government institute. Despite their limited means, they were determined to provide their children with better opportunities, always dreaming that their daughters would become nurses or medical professionals. This dream was realized when Bushra pursued her nursing diploma in 2011, a time when bachelor's programs were not yet common in Pakistan.

Bushra's early career saw her working in the labour and delivery department at a hospital for three years. However, she soon realized that to advance in her field, she needed to pursue higher education. This led her to apply for a master's program in nursing, despite the financial challenges it posed. At the time, only three universities in Pakistan offered such programs, all of which were expensive. Bushra secured admission at a university but knew she needed financial aid to afford the tuition.

Her family's financial situation was precarious. Her father had passed away in 2019, leaving her mother, who relied on a small pension, as her primary support system. Her brothers, all married with their own families, could not contribute significantly to her education. Despite these challenges, Bushra was determined to find a way to fund her studies. She applied for government scholarships but was not selected. It was during this time of uncertainty that she learned about the Scottish Scholarship through a senior who had received international funding.

Bushra's application process for the scholarship was a journey of hope and perseverance. She submitted her application with all the required evidence and then waited. A few months later, she received an email for an interview. The interview was straightforward, focusing on verifying the information she had provided. After another period of waiting, she received the joyous news that her university had received funding for her studies from the scholarship program.

The scholarship was a lifeline for Bushra. It covered her tuition fees, allowing her to focus entirely on her studies without the burden of financial stress. Additionally, she was provided with a laptop, an essential tool for her virtual studies during the pandemic. This support enabled her to work from home, attend online classes, and complete her thesis without the need to rely on library resources or shared devices.

Bushra's gratitude for the scholarship is profound. It not only alleviated her financial burdens but also empowered her to excel academically. She completed her master's degree and resumed her work as a nurse instructor. In December 2023, she joined a university as a senior lecturer, where she teaches and works with research teams on health projects in rural areas.

Belonging to a religious minority, Bushra's journey was not without its challenges. However, she credits her upbringing in a protected environment and her focus on her goals for helping her navigate any discrimination she faced. She acknowledges that many in her community do not have the same opportunities and emphasizes the importance of financial aid in enabling higher education for marginalized groups.

Bushra's story is one of inspiration and advocacy. She actively encourages others to apply for scholarships and shares her experiences to help them navigate the application process. Her commitment to her community extends beyond education; she is passionate about improving health outcomes for marginalized populations. Through her work with a prominent non-governmental organization (NGO), she aims to address nutritional deficiencies and health-related quality of life issues among women and children in her community.

Bushra's journey highlights the transformative power of educational support and the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity. Her story underscores the critical role that scholarships play in enabling students from underprivileged backgrounds to achieve their dreams and contribute positively to their communities.

Breaking barriers: Zoobia's journey of resilience and opportunity – Zoobia from a small town in Sindh

Zoobia, 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 Zoobia to excel academically. Despite facing health issues, she thrived in the supportive school environment, becoming more confident and engaged. Now in 9th grade, Zoobia continues to pursue her education with determination, inspired by her father's dedication and the support of the scholarship.

Zoobia's story is a powerful testament to resilience, parental dedication, and the transformative impact of educational support. Born with a hearing impairment, Zoobia faced significant challenges from an early age. Her father, a primary school teacher, was determined to provide her with the best possible education despite the family's financial constraints and the lack of adequate facilities in their hometown located in an underserved area of Sindh.

Recognizing the limitations of local government facilities, Zoobia's father made the difficult decision to move the family to a small city nearby, hoping to find better educational opportunities for his daughter. However, the government schools there also fell short of his expectations, with issues such as teacher absenteeism and inadequate transportation services.

It was during this challenging period that Zoobia's father discovered a Deaf School in the city. After meeting with the school's head, and observing the supportive environment, he decided to enrol Zoobia. The school provided a comprehensive support system, including laptops, programming sets, online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, pick-and-drop services, food, and educational materials, all funded by donations.

The Scottish Scholarship played a crucial role in Zoobia's educational journey. The scholarship covered essential expenses such as transportation, school uniforms, copies, and tuition fees, significantly easing



the financial burden on her family. This support allowed Zoobia to focus on her studies without the constant worry of financial constraints.

Zoobia's father, who commuted 115 kilometres daily to his job as a primary school teacher, was deeply committed to his children's education. His dedication paid off as Zoobia excelled academically, topping her class and receiving numerous awards and recognition. Despite facing health challenges, including kidney issues and intestinal TB, Zoobia remained active and engaged in her studies and extracurricular activities, earning praise from her teachers.

The scholarship not only provided financial relief but also boosted Zoobia's confidence and motivation. She became more interactive and participative in school, rarely missing classes even when unwell. The sense of security and stability provided by the scholarship and the supportive school environment helped her develop a strong desire to excel and progress in life.

Currently, Zoobia is in the 9th grade, continuing to thrive academically and personally. Her father's dream is for her to pursue higher education and utilize her knowledge to inspire others. He envisions a future where Zoobia and her siblings, who are also pursuing their education, can make meaningful contributions to society.

Zoobia's story highlights the critical role of scholarships in enabling students from underprivileged backgrounds to achieve their dreams. It underscores the importance of parental dedication and the impact of a supportive educational environment. Through resilience and the right opportunities, Zoobia is on a path to a brighter future, embodying the transformative power of education.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the challenges and successes of the British Council's scholarship program, this section outlines key recommendations aimed at strengthening the program's effectiveness and broadening its impact. These recommendations focus on addressing the identified barriers—such as low awareness, transportation challenges, and the need for career guidance—while also suggesting ways to enhance the overall support structure for beneficiaries. By implementing these changes, the program can further empower women to not only access education but also thrive in their careers, contributing to both individual growth and broader societal development.

Enhance support for research endeavours in STEM fields

The Scottish Scholarship Program, with its emphasis on STEM education at the Master's level, must expand its support for research, as it is a critical component of these fields. While 25% of current beneficiaries have expressed an aspiration to pursue research, graduates, particularly those at the PhD level, have reported considerable difficulties in securing research grants and accessing high-quality labs and tools. Similarly, many noted that their research significantly improved when they utilised the advanced resources available during their time in Scotland through the funded PhD under the Scottish Scholarship Program since the research opportunities and facilities locally available are both scarce and limited in scope.

To create long-term impact and drive innovation, the program should offer more robust and targeted support for research activities. This could include establishing research grants, assisting students in funding their research projects, and creating an environment where research can thrive. Further, the program could also resume the PhD scholarships as the beneficiaries who received these scholarships affirmed the transformational impact of the academic and personal exposure provided by these scholarships. By enhancing these aspects, the program will not only support individual scholars in their academic pursuits but also contribute to strengthening the overall research capacity in Pakistan. This approach will leave a lasting and transformative impact on the academic and scientific landscape of the country.

Celebrate and advertise the inclusion of vulnerable and underserved groups

The program has demonstrated a strong commitment to its core objective of supporting individuals from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, including minorities, people with disabilities, and those from remote or underserved areas. This success is evident in its current outreach: at the school level, 38% of beneficiaries belong to minority groups, while 2% are individuals with disabilities, achieved through strategic partnerships with specialised institutions. At the university level, the representation for minorities and people with disabilities stand at 14% and 2% respectively, indicating a very strong progress in this regard.

Mainstreaming religious minorities and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Pakistan's education system is hindered by societal stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, and inadequate policies to ensure equitable opportunities. This exclusion is further exacerbated by the economic challenges faced by these vulnerable groups. To enhance the program's impact and contribute to a broader wave of social mobility, inclusion, and empowerment, this aspect of the scholarship program needs to be advertised consistently in all its communications. It is an opportunity to expand its reach even further.

Address mobility issues of women

Addressing the issue of mobility is crucial to improving access to education, particularly for students from rural or distant areas. The data showed that 8% of school dropouts were due to the challenges associated with travel, making it a significant factor in hindering consistent attendance. This concern was repeatedly highlighted during in-depth interviews with beneficiaries, many of whom identified long commutes as a primary reason why girls, especially from remote areas, are forced to abandon their education. The cost of daily travel represents a substantial financial burden for these families, often making it untenable for them to continue sending their children to school.

By covering travel costs, the program can help alleviate this hurdle, enabling more students to attend school or university consistently and thereby



enhancing educational outcomes. This initiative would not only support the scholarship's goal of increasing access but also ensure that students from distant or disadvantaged regions can fully benefit from the opportunities the program offers.

mutual assistance in navigating the job market. By fostering these support systems, the scholarship can better equip its recipients to succeed professionally and contribute to the workforce, thus fulfilling its broader objectives.

Strengthen post-scholarship support for employability

To enhance the long-term impact of the Scottish Scholarship Program, it is crucial to provide comprehensive post-scholarship support to beneficiaries, **particularly in areas of career counselling, mentorship, and employability guidance**. The program's data indicates that a significant proportion of recent graduates report being unemployed, highlighting the need for targeted interventions in this area.

Given the current challenges in securing employment within the economic climate, the scholarship should offer **structured mentorship and career counselling services to its beneficiaries**. These services can play a pivotal role in helping graduates transition into the labour market, aligning with the program's intended outcome of improving labour force participation.

Additionally, **developing an alumni network among scholarship beneficiaries** could further enhance support. Such networks would enable graduates to build connections, share opportunities, and provide

Expanding scholarship opportunities

Education in Pakistan remains largely inaccessible, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, minority communities, and persons with disabilities. While the challenges are rooted in a complex web of factors, economic hardships significantly exacerbate these issues, directly compromising the education of these marginalised populations. In Pakistan, girls in poor families are 52% less likely to attend school than girls in well-off households.⁴

To better achieve the programme's objective of enhancing educational access for vulnerable groups, it is recommended to expand the scholarship scope by increasing the number of scholarships available. Currently, only 1% of applicants successfully secure a scholarship, highlighting a significant gap that can be addressed through enhanced funding and outreach. With 36% of children out of school, with 53% of them being girls⁵, Pakistan holds the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children⁶. Increasing scholarship availability can play a pivotal role in addressing this alarming statistic and prompting equitable access to education.

4. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/facing-challenges-girls-education-pakistan>

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

6. <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>

Annexure

Program's theory of change:

The program's main aim is to support ambitious young girls and women from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and enable the candidates to pursue higher education and achieve their goals. The idea is not only to benefit these young women but albeit indirectly also the communities they belong to. To understand the aim better, here is the theory of change in action:

