

# Financing and Strengthening Girls' Secondary Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



## Introduction & Background

Education is the catalyst for societal progress. Ensuring access to quality education for all children, particularly for girls, is essential for advancing gender equality and promoting sustainable development. When girls receive quality education, they not only transform their lives but also uplift their families and contribute meaningfully to the social and economic growth of their communities and the nation.

Pakistan has made international, national, and provincial commitments to advancing education. This includes the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which underscores the imperative of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Specifically, SDG target 4.1 aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education, while target 4.5 focuses on eliminating gender disparities and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training. At the national level, Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees every child the right to free and compulsory education. While at the provincial level, this includes the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free and Compulsory Primary & Secondary Education Act 2017, and its Implementation Rules of 2025.

In recent years, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken significant strides to improve girls' access to education through policy reforms, targeted programs, and strategic investments, including allocating 70% of the development budget to girls' education, in line with the de facto policy of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department. While these efforts have yielded tangible progress, numerous challenges still persist, and girls continue to face barriers to enrolling in school and completing their education.

Currently, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has approximately 4.9 million out-of-school children (OOSC), of whom 2.9 million are girls, accounting for 37% of children aged 5–16 years in the province.

## Districts with Highest Number of OOSC

### Peshawar

519,928	200,142	319,767
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Bajaur

292,894	113,677	179,210
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Swat

294,320	114,918	179,386
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Dera Ismail Khan

264,567	120,201	144,361
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Bannu

214,143	90,954	123,188
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Mardan

230,969	97,752	133,215
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

### Khyber

213,510	80,749	132,756
Estimated OOSC	Boys	Girls

The province has 34,784 government schools, of which 14,249 are girls' schools. Among these, only 2,601 are secondary schools. The number of teaching staff in all the girls' secondary schools is 21,836, compared to 36,598 in boys' schools, indicating a significant disparity in human resource allocation. Enrollment patterns reflect similar inequities: 653,522 girls are enrolled in secondary schools compared to 995,974 boys. The gross enrollment ratio (GER) for girls at the secondary level stands at 26.53%, compared to 36.81% for boys, whereas the net enrollment ratio (NER) is 19.89% for girls and 28.19% for boys.

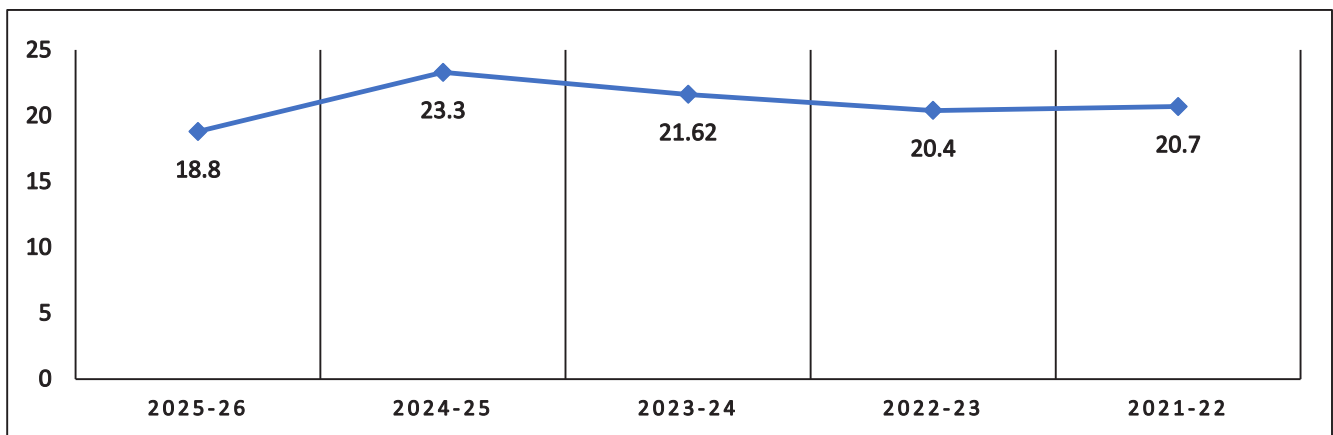
These disparities are further amplified by dropout rates and gender parity indicators. The transition from grade 7 to grade 8 sees a dropout rate of 20.87% for girls, compared to 15.16% for boys. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) reflects this gap, with a value of 0.96 at the primary level dropping sharply to 0.72 at the secondary level.

The Elementary and Secondary Education budget of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for FY 2025–26 stands at PKR 363.4 billion, of which 95% (PKR

344.597 billion) is allocated to the recurrent budget, while only 4% (PKR 18.815 billion) is allocated to the development budget. The allocation for the secondary sub-sector amounts to approximately 7.34 billion.

The trend in the provincial government's development budget allocated to the Elementary and Secondary Education Department over the last five years shows a relatively stable pattern, with no significant increases. The allocated budgets have been comprised of both local and foreign funds. Notably, the contribution of foreign funds has become more pronounced in the financial years 2023–24 and 2024–25. This reliance on foreign contributions suggests an effort to address funding gaps in the education sector and also highlights the importance of sustainable, locally generated funding sources to ensure the continuity and improvement of girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### Development Budgetary Trend - E&SED Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Amount: PKR/Billion)



## Annual Development Program (ADP) 2025-2026 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department

The Annual Development Program (ADP) for the Elementary and Secondary Education Department for the year 2025-2026 comprises a total of 96 schemes, which include 67 ongoing schemes and 29 new schemes. Of these 51 schemes relate to secondary education with 44 ongoing and 7 new schemes. Out of the 51 schemes, 7 are specifically tagged for gender equity and directly address girls' secondary education. The table below presents several projects that indicate the share of girls in the current ADP.

S.No	Name of the project	Total approved units	For girls	% age
1	Establishment of Girls Cadet College at D.I. Khan	01	01	100%
2	Upgradation of 50 Primary schools to Middle level (less 21 units)	29	24	82%
3	Upgradation of 50 Middle schools to High level (less 22 units)	28	13	46%
4	Upgradation of 50 High schools to Higher Secondary level (less 18 units)	32	8	25%
5	Reconstruction of 100 High Schools (less 79 units)	21	10	47%
6	Upgradation of 150 Primary schools to Middle level	83	42	50%
7	Upgradation of 100 Middle schools to High level	57	29	50%
8	Upgradation of 100 High schools to Higher Secondary level	51	17	33%
9	Establishment of 142 Science Labs in High & Higher Secondary schools	142	59	41%
10	Provision of Boundary walls and Wash facilities to 120 girls' schools (10 per District & 05 per SD) in the merged districts	120	120	100%
11	Provision of stipends to Primary & Secondary school students in merged areas	32,000 Students	18,000 girls' Students	56%

The table above shows that only one compact scheme allocated a significant share to girls' secondary education, thereby helping ensure a higher transition rate from primary to secondary education. The umbrella scheme also contributes to girls' secondary education. This situation highlights the need for a separate budget line or a compact project dedicated to girls' secondary education to improve transition and retention rates at the secondary level.

# Challenges to Girls' Secondary Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The challenges to girls' education can be broadly divided into two categories:

- A. Supply Side Factors
- B. Demand Side Factors

## A. Supply Side Factors

- Limited fiscal space in the provincial budget constrains allocation of sufficient resources for improving girls' secondary education. Competing demands across sectors result in inadequate funding for infrastructure development, teacher recruitment, and quality improvement initiatives.
- The focus of development programs has predominantly centered on traditional approaches, such as constructing physical buildings. The irony of this traditional method is evident in the low budget allocations for individual projects, frequent revisions, cost overruns, and delays in completion.
- There is a lack of secondary schools for girls, particularly in rural and remote areas. While the number of primary schools is relatively higher, there is a sharp decline in the number of middle and high schools for girls, limiting girls' progression from primary to secondary education.
- Girls' schools lack essential amenities such as functional toilets, clean drinking water, boundary walls, electricity, and menstrual hygiene management facilities. The absence of gender-

sensitive infrastructure and facilities discourages parents from sending their daughters to school, which contributes to higher dropout rates, particularly during adolescence.

- Cultural norms in many parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa necessitate the presence of female teachers in girls' schools; however, the shortage of qualified female teachers impacts girls' enrollment and retention, especially at the secondary level.
- Although the overall education budget and the allocations for development budget have increased over the years, the proportion of the budget allocated to development expenditures relative to recurrent expenditures remains low, limiting investments in new infrastructure, school expansion, and programs, schemes, and initiatives specifically aimed at improving access and quality of secondary education for girls.
- Within the overall development portfolio, only a limited number of programs, schemes, and initiatives are specifically designed to address the unique needs of girls, resulting in inadequate attention to gender-sensitive interventions.
- The limited financial management capacity and ineffective utilization of funds by Parent-Teacher Councils (PTCs) have resulted in low spending efficiency, reducing the impact of available resources on improving school infrastructure and facilities, and learning outcomes for girls.

- There exists a dichotomy in the approach to education planning and implementation, where policies and programs at the central or provincial level are not fully aligned with local needs, leading to inconsistencies in resource allocation, program design, and execution, which ultimately affect the quality and accessibility of education for girls.
- There is lack of robust monitoring systems and accountability mechanisms which often leads to mismanagement of the funds, underperformance, and delayed interventions.
- The absence of structured consultation and engagement with local communities, including parents, girls, and CSOs, in planning and implementation of education initiatives reduces the relevance and sustainability of the government schemes and initiatives.
- Low investment in, and inconsistent implementation of schemes and initiatives such as girls' stipend programs, free transport, textbooks, uniforms, school bags, stationery, scholarships, and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) support undermine their potential to sustain girls' participation at the secondary level, often leading to disruptions in continuity and increased risk of dropout.
- While enrollment campaigns by the Education Department are conducted biannually, investment in the sustained community mobilization and behavior change initiatives limits their

effectiveness in shifting deeply rooted norms, resulting in low retention and transition of girls to secondary education.

## **B. Demand Side Factors**

- Socio-cultural norms and deeply rooted gender biases often deprioritize girls' education, particularly beyond the primary level, as families tend to favor boys' schooling due to perceived economic returns.
- Economic constraints also play a critical role, with poverty compelling families to withdraw girls from school due to direct and indirect costs such as transportation, uniforms, and learning materials. In many cases, girls' education is viewed as a lower investment priority, especially in resource-constrained households. Additionally, lack of awareness regarding the long-term benefits of girls' secondary education further reduces demand, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- Safety and mobility concerns also discourage families from sending girls to secondary schools, which are often located far from home.
- The absence of safe transportation options and fears related to harassment or insecurity further restrict girls' educational participation.

## Recommendations

- Education financing and the development budget should be increased, with specific, dedicated allocations for girls' secondary education schemes, initiatives, and programs.
  - Development schemes and programs should be aligned with and informed by local needs and gender-disaggregated data.
  - All the girls' schools should be provided with safe, functional facilities, including toilets, boundary walls, clean drinking water, electricity, and menstrual hygiene management support to ensure an enabling environment that encourages enrollment and reduces dropout rates.
  - Government should launch targeted teacher recruitment drives, especially in rural areas, and provide professional development, gender-responsive pedagogical training, and career advancement opportunities to strengthen teaching quality and support girls' improved learning.
- Robust monitoring and accountability systems should be implemented at the provincial, district, and school levels to track enrollment, retention, learning outcomes, and the effectiveness of girls' education schemes, complemented by regular program evaluations to identify successful interventions, scale effective initiatives, and discontinue those that do not deliver measurable results.
  - Parent-Teacher Councils (PTCs) should be strengthened to ensure active

community participation in school management, improve accountability, and enable local stakeholders to address barriers that prevent girls from enrolling or continuing secondary education.

Improving the state of girls' secondary education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not only a matter of constitutional obligation but also a strategic investment in the province's social and economic development. Persistent gaps in infrastructure, teacher availability, budget allocation, and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit girls' enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach that prioritizes girls' education through dedicated funding, gender-sensitive and evidence-based programming, strengthened community engagement, and robust accountability mechanisms. Only through targeted interventions and the creation of a supportive, gender-responsive learning environment can girls be empowered to complete secondary education, unlock their full potential, and contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development of their communities and the province as a whole.

## Data Sources

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics Digital Population Census 2023

Schools Statistical Report 2024-25, Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Annual Development Program 2025-2026 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



SCAN FOR WEBSITE

