



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2025

Australia Awards
– Pakistan



Highlights of 2025

In 2025, Australia Awards continued to support Pakistan's development priorities by equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and leadership experience to drive meaningful change.

It was a year of growth for Australia Awards, demonstrating Australia's commitment to building human capability in Pakistan, with increases in:

- new Scholarships offered for master's degree-level study (20, compared to 16 in 2024)
- instances of scholars participating in enrichment opportunities (36, compared to 25 in 2024)
- Short Courses completed by Pakistani participants (four, compared to two in 2024).

In total, 71 Australia Awards scholars, fellows and Short Course participants from Pakistan undertook education, training and professional development during 2025.

Ten of these scholars completed their degrees at Australia's world-class universities and returned home as alumni, committed to contributing to Pakistan's development.

A comprehensive schedule of enrichment activities, including five flagship Scholars Symposiums, enhanced Pakistani scholars' professional capabilities and facilitated networking with senior Australian leaders.

Indigenous engagement was an important theme throughout the year's activities, giving Pakistani scholars the chance to learn about the culture, history and achievements of Australia's First Nations people.

As targeted short-term training opportunities to strengthen sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, Australia Awards also supported 24 Pakistanis to complete four Short Courses.

For alumni, Australia Awards provided professional development and networking opportunities in Pakistan and regionally. A highlight was the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka, which had the theme 'From inclusion to equity: Development for all'. Seven Pakistanis joined other alumni from South Asia and Mongolia at the workshop, which launched the Equity for All alumni network. This fourth regional alumni network (alongside the Regional Women in Leadership Network, Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network, and Champions for the Environment and Climate Action) enabled participants to continue collaborating on equity-focused initiatives for people with disability and from marginalised communities.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Pakistan. From left to right: Aamina Ihsan, Faiqa Sahar, Dr Atta Ullah and Aamna Ameen Sahibzada.

"Being an Australia Awards scholar has been a life-changing experience, combining outstanding academic opportunities with enriching professional and cultural exposure. From attending a conference in Brisbane with the support of a professional development grant, to exploring the richness of Aboriginal culture during the Ikara-Flinders Ranges First Nations Study Tour, and being mesmerised by the Great Barrier Reef while participating in an Australia Awards event in Cairns, each experience enriched me personally and professionally, igniting a deeper sense of responsibility and leadership to drive positive change in my community."

Zoha Shakir

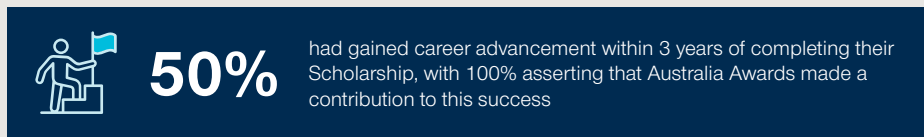
Master of International and Development Economics
The Australian National University
commenced 2025



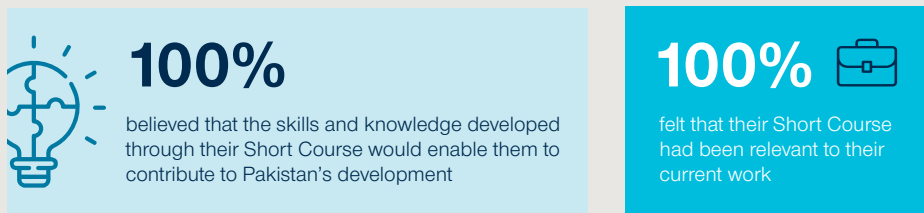
Outcomes at a glance

Outcome: Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Pakistan surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Pakistan surveyed:



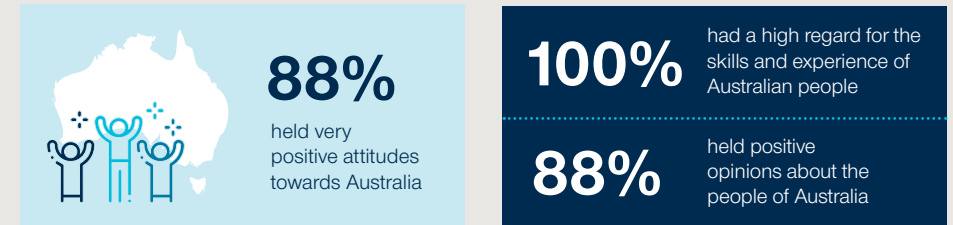
Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and Pakistan

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Pakistan surveyed:




Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Pakistan surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Pakistan surveyed:





“My Australia Awards experience has been a truly transformative journey of growth that strengthened my confidence, resilience and sense of discovery. Studying climate change in Australia has broadened my perspective, fostered lifelong friendships in a multicultural environment, and inspired me to contribute to climate action in my home country.”

Shamsa Yousaf
Master of Climate Change
The Australian National University
commenced 2025

Australia Awards Scholarships

In 2025, Australia Awards Scholarship recipients from Pakistan achieved strong academic and professional outcomes. During the year, 10 scholars completed their master’s degrees, ready to return home as alumni and apply their learning in support of Pakistan’s development priorities.

At the other end of their Scholarship journey, 14 scholars from Pakistan commenced master’s-level study at Australian universities in 2025. This brought the total number of Pakistani scholars studying in Australia in 2025 to 27.

To complement scholars’ studies and strengthen their leadership capability, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered 23 scholar enrichment opportunities throughout the year, including the flagship Scholars Symposiums (see page 07). Scholars from Pakistan participated in these opportunities 37 times, engaging in professional development activities such as grants, internships and online communication training.

Consistent with Australia’s policy priorities, enrichment activities strongly emphasised gender equality, Indigenous engagement and equity for people with disability. Key activities included:

- immersive cultural engagement with Indigenous Australians (see page 04)
- an International Women’s Day online seminar with Indigenous women’s advocate Vicky Welgraven AM
- a World Environment Day seminar with Professor Anne Poelina,

highlighting the connection between Indigenous knowledge and environmental management

- *Disability Sector Connect*, a study tour in Adelaide focused on innovation and best practice in disability advocacy and inclusion.

Muhammad Talha Noman, a Pakistani scholar with disability who took part in *Disability Sector Connect*, said, “It was a great experience of knowledge sharing. I enjoyed connecting with people with disabilities and the organisations working to provide them with services.”

As part of a new initiative, Pakistani scholar Wirdah Kaif was appointed a Scholar Ambassador in Victoria. In this role, Wirdah promotes scholar enrichment activities, and acts as a voice for scholars from South Asia and Mongolia in Melbourne.

Representing Australia’s continued investment in long-term development outcomes, 20 emerging leaders from Pakistan received Scholarships to commence study in Australia in 2026, a 25% increase on the previous year. This cohort included 12 women, reflecting Australia’s commitment to equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender.

Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

In 2025, Australia Awards scholars from Pakistan participated in a series of Indigenous engagement activities held across Australia and online, alongside scholars from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The flagship activity was a four-day, three-night immersive First Nations study tour in the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, South Australia. Ten selected scholars from South Asia and Mongolia, including several who identify as indigenous or come from traditionally marginalised groups, travelled from across Australia to participate in this experience. Scholars undertook activities to learn about the relationship that the Adnyamathanha people, the Traditional Owners of the greater Ikara and Flinders Ranges area, have with the environment. Scholars also learnt about Indigenous history, knowledge and perspectives through a trivia and storytelling event at Ikara, leading to a discussion of the 2025 NAIDOC Week theme: 'The Next Generation: Strength, Vision & Legacy'.

Pakistani scholar Zoha Shakir said, "Every activity was unique and enriching, but what resonated with me most were the stories shared by the Adnyamathanha people. Their deep spiritual connection to the land, their storytelling traditions and the pride they hold in their culture were both moving and inspiring." She added, "I had an absolutely incredible experience during this study tour. It's an experience I'll always treasure."

In Sydney, scholars travelled to Bundeena Royal National Park, located on the traditional lands of the Dharawal people. Richard Campbell, an Elder of the Yuin Nation, began the tour with a smoking ceremony, Welcome to Country and face-painting using ochre. Richard shared cultural stories through traditional artefacts, such as fire sticks, boomerangs, digging tools, shields and animal furs. Scholars also had the opportunity for hands-on engagement by learning traditional boomerang throwing and fire-making techniques.

Reflecting on the experience, Pakistani scholar Muhammad Tallha Noman expressed his appreciation for the opportunity. "I thoroughly enjoyed the Country Walk and valued the chance to learn more about the rich culture, history and traditions of Aboriginal people through meaningful interactions during the walk," he said.

Each of these scholar experiences helped participants gain deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous Australians' culture, history and achievements.

Image: Pakistani Australia Awards scholar Muhammad Tallha Noman (Master of Engineering, The University of New South Wales, commenced 2025) is welcomed to Country by Richard Campbell, an Elder of the Yuin Nation.



Short-term training

In 2025, Australia Awards delivered short-term training opportunities to 44 Pakistanis (23 women, 21 men) in priority sectors, including water, climate change and gender equality. These Short Courses and Fellowships strengthened participants' skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to Pakistan's development.



Image: Pakistani participants in the Short Course on Supporting Water Security, Resilience and Transitioning to Circular Cities in Pakistan with representatives of the University of Technology Sydney.

A total of 24 Pakistanis completed Short Courses designed to build sector-specific capability and foster collaboration, all of which involved learning, networking and site visits in Australia, as follows.

Seventeen participants completed a Short Course on *Supporting Water Security, Resilience and Transitioning to Circular Cities in Pakistan*. Participants learnt about circular economy theories and concepts through case studies and site visits to observe operations and innovative technologies in Australia. They had opportunities to network with Australian water industry professionals in the public and private sectors.

A further seven Pakistanis completed three Regional Short Courses, enabling engagement with counterparts across the region working in similar fields.

Three Pakistanis completed a Regional Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*. Participants explored how stronger policy coherence between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation could support sustainable development.

Three Pakistanis also undertook a Regional Short Course on *Accessing Climate Finance*, which built participants' capability to navigate the complex landscape of climate-related finance, international agreements, green banking and sustainable investing.

These two Regional Short Courses each included two weeks of learning in Australia, enabling participants to network with Australian experts, including at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Department of the Treasury, Energy Queensland, the National Adaptation Policy Office and the Clean Investor Group. Participants also visited SolarShare, Australia's largest community-owned solar farm.

One Pakistani completed a Regional Short Course on *Women in Executive Leadership Development*, focused on gender equality and women's leadership. The course was aimed at enabling women to clarify their leadership ambitions, recognise their leadership strengths, access leadership positions and explore the importance of strong female role models to drive the next generation of women.

Alumni engagement

Australia Awards alumni engagement activities in 2025 focused on supporting professional development, building linkages and increasing knowledge of priority development topics, including gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

More than 70 participants collectively benefited from alumni engagement activities in Pakistan. These activities included:

- a Recognition Ceremony and Reintegration Workshop for 21 recently returned Scholarship alumni
- a workshop focused on enhancing knowledge and skills in artificial intelligence
- alumni participating in the interview panel for Scholarship applicants and the Pre-Departure Briefing for Scholarship recipients.

Alumni from Pakistan built linkages with counterparts from South Asia and Mongolia and heard from Australian leaders through regional engagement opportunities, headlined by the Regional Alumni Workshop (see page 07).

Four regional thematic alumni networks (the Regional Women in Leadership Network, Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network, Champions for the Environment and Climate Action, and Equity for All alumni network) also provided opportunities for alumni across South Asia and Mongolia to engage on gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

A total of 22 regional alumni events registered more than 40 participants from Pakistan. Activities included:

- a workshop where alumni shared their experiences of accessing climate finance, featuring a presentation from Pakistani alumna Mehak Masood
- an event for International Day of People with Disability, featuring Pakistani alumna Saira Ayub as a speaker
- briefings from DFAT officials on *Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy* and *International Gender Equality Strategy*
- a Regional Women in Leadership Network seminar with Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Anna Cody.

Speaking about the latter event, Pakistani alumna Tooba Khan said, "Dr Anna Cody's message around equity, inclusion and structural reform deeply resonated with me. Events like this are a vital reminder that real change begins with informed conversations and courageous, collective leadership."

"The Australia Awards experience transformed my professional outlook, equipping me with global knowledge and lifelong connections to create real impact back home. Furthermore, it opened doors I never imagined, empowering me to contribute to a more sustainable and connected world."

Dr Atta Ullah
Master of Agricultural Sciences
The University of Melbourne, 2025



Case studies

Scholars strengthen leadership skills at Scholar Symposiums

From October to December 2025, 12 Pakistani Australia Awards scholars participated in five Scholar Symposiums across Australia. These events were designed to help scholars develop the skills to be changemakers after completing their Scholarships.

Delivering opening remarks in Canberra on behalf of the scholars, Shamsa Yousaf said, “We are not just scholars; we are changemakers in the making, each carrying the torch of knowledge to light the path of progress.”

Each symposium saw a panel of experts speaking about various leadership topics, including the importance of values for leaders, tips for networking and advice on advocating for change. The panellists included:

- Senator Charlotte Walker, the youngest person elected to Australia’s Senate, in Adelaide
- Qamar Zaman, the Consul General of Pakistan, in Sydney
- Saadia Adnan, a PhD candidate at the University of Adelaide and an Australia Awards alumna herself, in Adelaide.

The first afternoon of each symposium was dedicated to training to help scholars apply

what they had heard across the morning. Canberra-based scholar Muhammad Naeem Orakzai said, “Listening to the panellists and the facilitator gave me useful information through experiences and a structured lecture on leadership.”

On the second day of the symposiums, scholars examined their Development Impact and Linkages Plans (DILPs) and whether they needed updating. Adelaide-based scholar Muhammad Haris said, “A review of our DILP was really helpful for both personal and professional development.”

Each symposium concluded with scholars engaging with First Nations Australians. Activities included art lessons from Indigenous teachers and learning to throw a boomerang. Melbourne-based scholar Sajal Tariq said, “Engaging with the Indigenous artist [Rhys Jeffs] helped me reimagine the meaning of my calm and peace.”

For many attendees, the most valuable aspect of the events was the opportunity to network with other scholars from the region. “I enjoyed the intellectual discourse and learnt a lot from the perspective of panellists and fellow scholars,” said Canberra-based scholar Zoha Shakir.

Summing up the views of many, scholar Usama Jadoon described the Sydney symposium as “a great opportunity to reflect on my career, life goals and communication skills”.

Alumni unite for equity and development

Seven Pakistanis were among the 51 Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia who attended the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka on 7–9 April.

The workshop’s theme was ‘From inclusion to equity: Development for all’. Through alumni presentations, panel discussions and group exercises, attendees discussed advocacy for the rights of people with disability and people from traditionally marginalised communities. Thirteen participants were people with disability, including three from Pakistan.

Pakistani alumni played a central role in delivering the workshop: Saira Ayub was a panellist, while alumnae Rehana Shaikh and Aqsa Ali facilitated sessions.

Opening the event, HE Mr Paul Stephens, Australia’s then High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, said, “The workshop theme recognises that it is not enough to seek inclusion for people from marginalised communities and people with disability ... rather, we must tackle the unequal power systems and structures that hinder economic growth and human development.”

The workshop featured three keynote presentations, each followed by a discussion panel featuring alumni. These presentations and panels covered topics such as advocacy

by and for people with disability, making education accessible to all, and why development practitioners working with people with disability and from minority communities should consider intersectionality.

Participants also examined common challenges—dividing into groups to brainstorm approaches to each challenge, then presenting their ideas. Pakistani alumna Umme Kulsoom led a discussion on the challenge posed by the lack of inclusive facilities and services for people with disability in the legal system, and alumna Sarwat Ara shared the challenge she faced in removing digital barriers for people with disability.

The workshop marked ten years since the inaugural Regional Alumni Workshop, at which the Women in Leadership Network was launched. The 2025 workshop saw the launch of the Equity for All alumni network, enabling participants to collaborate beyond the event.



Image: Australia Awards alumnae from Pakistan at the Regional Alumni Workshop. From left to right: Sataish Ansar, Umme Kulsoom and Sarwat Ara.

Australia Awards – Pakistan forms part of the Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia Program and is managed by Palladium on behalf of the Australian Government.

Images in this publication are of Australia Awards recipients, scholars and alumni participating in Program activities.

To learn more about Australia Awards – Pakistan, visit:
www.australiaawardspakistan.org