



Girls' education in Pakistan - Malala Yousafzai

The European Parliament's 2013 Sakharov Prize will be awarded to 16 year old education activist Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan.

Malala Yousafzai's campaign

Yousafzai showed extraordinary courage in continuing her fight for girls' education in the face of adversity: she comes from the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan, which was ruled by the Taliban in 2008 and 2009. Daughter of a girls' school head, Yousafzai described life under the Taliban for the [BBC](#), aged 11. Since the Taliban tried to assassinate her in October 2012, Yousafzai has become world famous. Her "Malala Fund", set up with help from actress Angelina Jolie, supports girls in developing countries who want to go to school. She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Pakistani girls' education

Pakistan is the country with the second highest number of children out of school, according to [UNESCO](#). Two-thirds (over 3 million) of these are girls. [Compared](#) to other lower middle income countries, Pakistan has a low primary enrolment rate. Only 54% of [girls](#) are enrolled in primary school, which drops to 30% for secondary school. The figures for girls from rural areas are even worse (50% primary enrolment, 24% secondary). These figures vary by region. Girls are also more likely than boys to [drop out](#) of primary school, mainly owing to poverty. Although gender parity in education improved from 2001 to 2011, the [World Bank](#) still reports a ratio of 79 girls to 100 boys in primary and secondary schools (see figure 1). About 5% of children currently in school attend *Madrassas* – Muslim religious seminaries. Islamic organisations have expanded the scope of *Madrassas* to cover mainstream education. This has attracted the interest of the government and some external agencies, since it could give girls education otherwise denied. Two [academics](#) hold the view that improving state education would be far better for advancing gender equality than concentrating on *Madrassas*. UNESCO figures show that state

spending on education decreased from 1999 to 2010, to just 2.3% of gross national product.

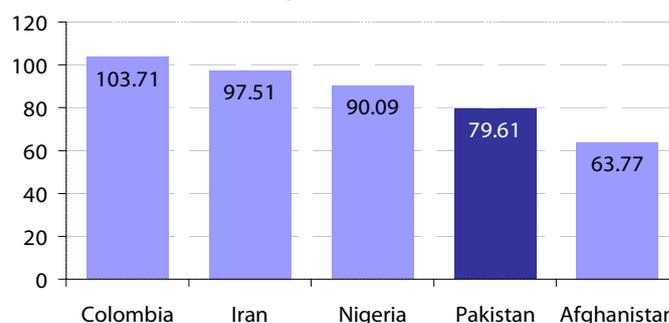
Causes of low enrolment figures

Poverty is an obvious adverse factor for girls' schooling. When large families can only afford school for some of their children, daughters often lose out to sons. Other factors hindering girls' education identified by [researchers](#) from the Pakistani Population Council include: access and long distances to school (with dangers of sexual violence), cultural constraints, early marriage and/or pregnancy, and lack of water and sanitation in schools.

Taliban's effect on girls' education

During their brief rule over the Swat Valley, the Taliban destroyed more than 400 schools. More than half of these were girls' schools. They argued that women (and girls) should stay in the home. The European Parliament stated in a 2012 [resolution](#) that violent extremism in Pakistan continues to impede the rights of girls. Since the government regained control of the region in 2009, it has rebuilt most of these schools, but there is still high inequality: there [are](#) 717 primary schools for boys, but only 425 for girls. Talimand Khan, from a Pakistani think-tank, adds that along with the number of schools, the quality of education has to be improved, too; some Pakistani religious representatives stated in [interviews](#) that girls should not receive the same education as boys, but be prepared to become 'obedient' wives and mothers.

Fig. 1: Ratio of girls to boys in education; selected states with GDP comparable to Pakistan



NB Figures shows number of girls for 100 boys in primary and secondary education, 2010. Date source: [World Bank](#).

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