

**Government of Pakistan
Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division
Press Release**

Vice Chancellors Welcome Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme



October 26, 2019- Islamabad: Dr. Sania Nishtar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation has termed the Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme as highly transformational, as it is the largest ever need-based scholarship programme to promote human capital investment. The formal launch of the Scheme by the Prime Minister is planned for next week.

She was telephonically addressing the 26th Vice Chancellors Committee Meeting convened by Dr. Muhammad Ali, Chair of the VCs Committee to brief them about the Government's upcoming Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme. The heads of public universities across the country attended the meeting, majority of them joined through video link from their campuses.

She said that the Prime Minister Imran Khan is keen that this Scheme should benefit maximum number of students across the country, and that the Government will allocate more resources for it in the coming years.

Dr. Tariq Banuri, Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) gave a detailed briefing to the Vice Chancellors on the newly conceptualised scholarship scheme, entitled Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme.

Dr. Banuri said the Scheme is the largest ever undergraduate scholarship initiative of Pakistan seeking to award 50,000 scholarships per year to undergraduate students from low-income families. He said that the Scheme is an outcome of mutual understanding between HEC and Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) under the auspices of Government's Ehsaas Programme.

In the last 14 years, HEC has awarded a total of 30,000 undergraduate scholarships, while this Scheme will give 50,000 scholarships every year. It is a huge paradigm shift. "The objective is that no child should remain deprived of education due to financial constraints."

The Scheme will award Ehsaas scholarships to low-income students enrolled in four and five-year undergraduate programmes. All students from low-income families studying in undergraduate programs in public sector universities are eligible to apply. Selection will be based on need-cum-merit, i.e., on the basis of the student's GPA and family income (below a maximum threshold). The scholarship covers tuition fee and a living stipend.

Fifty per cent of the scholarships will be awarded to female students, while students with special needs as well as those from remote and disadvantaged areas will also be encouraged to apply. He informed the VCs that Rs. 20 billion i.e., Rs. 5 billion per annum have been allocated to the scheme for four years. However, the amount could be increased.

Dr. Banuri emphasized that universities must disburse the amount justly and speedily so that students do not face problems in pursuing their studies. He also emphasized on strengthening universities' vetting system to ensure transparency in award of scholarships.

A Steering Committee, jointly headed by Dr. Sania Nishtar and Dr. Tariq Banuri has been established to formulate policy guidelines. On-the-ground management will be in the hands of the participating universities, which will have to establish transparent operational systems to administer the scheme. "We need to work as a team to make this mega scheme a success," he concluded.

Dr. Banuri made it clear that the scholarship scheme is no substitute for the higher education sector's funding. "We request the government to ensure provision of the required resources to the sector and reverse the recent funding cuts."

University heads from across the country spoke on the occasion. They appreciated the Government for launching a project that would provide relief and assistance to thousands of students and their families in all regions of the country. They raised various queries and provided advice about mechanism of scholarship distribution and disbursement.