

# Azim Premji Foundation commits ₹2,250 crore for girls' college education

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Anurag Behar, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Azim Premji Foundation. **(Mint)**

Bengaluru: Azim Premji Foundation has committed to giving ₹2,250 crore over three years to help more girls complete their college education, making it the country's largest direct benefit transfer scheme by a not-for-profit private entity.

Under the initiative, a girl who has completed her standard X and XII from a government school can apply for the Azim Premji scholarship. Billionaire and philanthropist Azim Premji's eponymous foundation, Azim Premji Foundation, would give ₹30,000 a year to up to 2.5 lakh girl students.

This translates to ₹750 crore a year, which, over a three-year degree program, would total ₹2,250 crore.

“The basic purpose of this is to allow girl children to complete their higher education,” said Anurag Behar, chief executive officer of Azim Premji Foundation. “If a girl has completed 10th and 12th from a government school and is admitted to a bona fide college, the child is eligible to get ₹30,000 every year for the duration of her course.”

Beginning in September, a girl who starts college and has received the Azim Premji scholarship will receive ₹90,000 over a three-year degree program.

According to the Economic Survey 2024-25, the country's education system has about 15 lakh schools and nearly 25 crore students. Nearly half of the students are in government schools. Primary schools have a 93% gross enrolment ratio, which falls to 77.4% by the time a student enters standard VI. Only 56.2% of children complete 12th-standard schooling, and less than a third pursue college.

Fewer girls than boys enrol in colleges, and financial constraints are one of the primary reasons for this discrepancy among the poor.

“India has made enormous progress over the years. The enrolment ratio for boys and girls is almost equal at the primary school level. But, for many economically disadvantaged groups, higher education is difficult. And it is often a girl child who has to make sacrifices,” said Behar.

“Our hope is that with this scholarship, we can support more girls in continuing their education. Because if a girl can complete higher education, she becomes empowered and can control her life's trajectory.”

Premji's father, Mohamed Hasham Premji, founded Wipro in 1945. At the turn of the century, Premji became the country's richest billionaire after the

Y2K boom made investors rush to buy stocks of information technology services companies.

Premji then decided to set up the Azim Premji Foundation in 2001, with an initial corpus of \$125 million of Wipro shares. Over the past 24 years, the Azim Premji Foundation has trained thousands of teachers across 60 districts in six states so that students can be taught better in government schools.

Over the past two-and-a-half decades, the Azim Premji Foundation has established a university and a grant-making arm to give money to NGOs. It has even ventured into healthcare by setting up primary healthcare clinics. During this time, Premji donated \$21 billion, or 92% of his wealth, making him arguably the country's most generous billionaire.

Infosys Ltd's co-founder and chairman, Nandan Nilekani, has described Premji as a "giant figure".

For now, Azim Premji Foundation does not disclose its endowment assets, which include 67% of Wipro shares and ownership of Premji Invest, the billionaire's family office. At the end of 2023, the foundation had an endowment of \$38 billion, making it the world's fifth-largest private endowment.