



Sustainable Development Goal 4.b in the Pacific

**A pilot study for monitoring tertiary
education scholarships for development**

July 2024

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The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Centre drives improvements in monitoring the quality of education worldwide.

Sustainable Development Goal 4.b in the Pacific – A pilot study for monitoring tertiary education scholarships for development.

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Most importantly, thank you to the scholarships stakeholders who supported this pilot study and spent time contributing their data.

Acknowledgement of Country

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I. Background

The contribution of SDG 4.b to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG 4 includes 10 targets, of which Target 4.b aims to expand higher education scholarships for developing countries:



By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries (United Nations, 2015, p.19).

Target 4.b leverages the benefits of international education to support countries in achieving SDG 4. For host and sending countries, the exchange of students across borders shares the societal benefits produced by tertiary education (knowledge, information, innovation) (Perna et al., 2014). The modality of scholarships broadens access to high-quality tertiary education in areas necessary for locally-led development and provides opportunities for partnership and collaboration to achieve the SDGs.

Although SDG 4.b makes clear the objective is to contribute to building human capital and knowledge in low- and middle-income countries, it is not explicit as to which scholarships should be included in measuring the achievement of the target (Balfour, 2016; IIE2016; Antoninis, 2018). In particular, the inclusion or exclusion of providers outside of traditional donors, such as developing countries and non-state actors like corporations and universities, is not explicit in Target 4.b (Balfour, 2016; Antoninis, 2018). The reality is that various stakeholders are implementing international scholarships for developing countries, and the breadth of this contribution to human capital development is unclear. Therefore, the approach to monitoring SDG 4.b in this pilot study aims to include a broad range of stakeholders involved in funding international scholarships. Unlike other monitoring attempts, this study not only focuses on official development assistance (ODA) from developed countries but also specifically includes contributions from developing countries and non-state actors.

How many individuals from Pacific Island countries receive a tertiary scholarship?

This pilot study began with the aim of identifying the number of scholarships dispersed across the Pacific. This aim was based on the hypothesis that if we know the volume and spread of scholarships (particularly international scholarships) in the region, then donors and Pacific Island countries can more effectively contribute to supporting human capital development in priority areas.

Until now, the monitoring of SDG 4.b has relied on global indicator 4.b.1 – the volume of official development assistance (ODA) flows for international scholarships (UNESCO, 2015) – in other words, a funding focus. This approach was adopted as a ‘shortcut solution’ due to challenges in obtaining data on the number of scholarships (Antoninis, 2018). However, the lack of reliable data on the range and number of scholarships obscures overlapping funding and potential gaps, and understates the contribution of SDG 4.b to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In essence, understanding contributions to SDG 4.b through funding contributions alone does not result in a useful indication of progress or outcomes.

Piloting a new approach to monitoring SDG 4.b in the Pacific

This pilot study responds to the observed data challenges by developing a monitoring approach focused on Pacific Island countries and coordinated data sharing for thematic indicator SDG 4.b.2 – Number of higher education scholarships awarded by beneficiary country. This report outlines the methodology, outputs and outcomes of the pilot study.

The study design was desk-based, with a range of data contributed by 8 government scholarships stakeholders (donor and recipient) and one philanthropic foundation. The data collated can be disaggregated by country (donor and recipient location), gender, study location (in-country, regional, international), field of study, and level of qualification. An [interactive online data dashboard](#) showcases this regional data and can be used as a tool by all stakeholders to identify trends, gaps, and overlaps in their scholarships investments and to demonstrate the collective contribution to the SDGs.

2. Current monitoring for SDG 4.b– identifying evidence gaps

Global Indicator 4.b.1: Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study¹

Currently used? Yes

¹ **Global indicators:** a small set of globally comparable indicators for all SDGs, including SDG 4 on education, developed through a consultative process led by the United Nations Statistical Commission to monitor progress towards the associated targets.



Thematic indicator 4.b.2: Number of higher education scholarships awarded by beneficiary country²

Currently used? No

Two indicators were developed for monitoring SDG 4.b. Global indicator 4.b.1 tracks progress by the volume of ODA flows for scholarships funding to developing countries, and thematic indicator 4.b.2 monitors scholarships commitments by the number awarded. Only global indicator 4.b.1 has been implemented. Target 4.b.1 is based entirely on donor government ODA funding and therefore excludes funding by non-ODA government donors, such as developing nations investing in scholarships for their own citizens or contributing to other countries, and financing by non-government organisations, including philanthropic foundations and corporate and private donors. These sources of international scholarships funding are also not readily accessible. Still, they are essential in creating a more complete picture of the investment landscape for scholarships for development (IIE, 2016).

Furthermore, monitoring by financial volume loses accuracy when considering costs by location and the rising costs associated with fully funded scholarships. To sponsor international study in Suva, Fiji, costs less than in Sydney, Australia, and an increase in funding to meet adequate levels of academic support may not equate to a rise in the number of scholarships dispersed. This approach may also discourage funding qualifications that are longer to complete or a reduction in the number of scholarships awarded.

There is an ongoing challenge to identifying the total number of scholarships available to developing countries globally, regionally, and even nationally. Further, disaggregated information on gender, field of study, level of qualification, study location, funding source, etcetera is inconsistently collected and shared by scholarships donors, which limits the collective understanding of scholarships investments in meeting national development needs.

However, the use of thematic indicator 4.b.2 is complicated by the longstanding popularity of scholarships investments by various sectors (government, foundations, and private), resulting in a competitive, diverse, and uncoordinated landscape. In addition, only governments are accountable for the achievement of SDG 4.b. Consequently, reliable data on scholarship programs and their participants is underreported, understating the contribution of scholarships to sustainable

² **Thematic indicators:** a broader set of globally comparable indicators proposed by the education community to track the education targets more comprehensively across countries; they will include the global indicators.

development as well as complicating implementing monitoring of SDG 4.b by the number of scholarships dispersed (Dassin et al., 2018; IIE, 2016, Balfour, 2016).

These monitoring challenges contribute to one unaddressed overarching problem: limited centralised monitoring means overlaps and gaps in international scholarships funding are not visible, likely contributing to missed opportunities to support tertiary education for all and improved targeting of scholarships for human capital development. Addressing these challenges will improve the monitoring of SDG 4.

3. Pilot methodology – focusing on people

The methodology for monitoring SDG 4.b developed in this pilot study tested the feasibility of regional cooperation contributing scholarships data awarded in 2018, 2020, and 2022; drawing on 3 points in time to capture a 5-year period. The study design was desk-based, working with national scholarship coordination units across the Pacific and international donors to collect information to monitor SDG 4.b. Figure 1 outlines the study design.

Engagement with stakeholders used a 2-step data collection approach to collate the breadth of data on scholarship programs. First, by engaging with Pacific Island national scholarship coordination units to identify the range of data available to them, then to stakeholders funding or managing scholarships in the region. As a co-funder of this study, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided Australian scholarships data to initiate engagement with Pacific counterparts, demonstrating the information requested and the benefits of data collaboration.

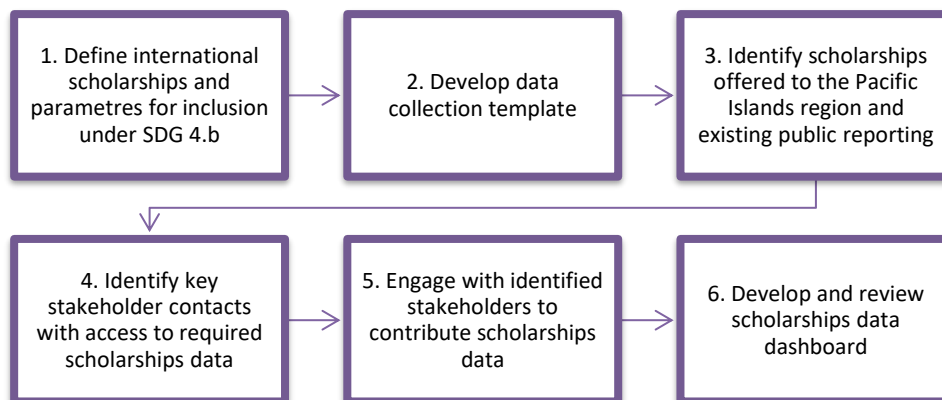


Figure 1: Process to developing the pilot study methodology

Defining international scholarships

For this study, a definition for international scholarships was developed to identify scholarships to be included in the monitoring methodology. This definition draws on the purpose of SDG 4.b, which is to improve a nation’s human resource capabilities to

achieve development priorities. Using this ‘scholarships for development’ lens, the definition developed by this study is applied as follows:

International scholarships for development are specifically for people from developing countries to undertake an award course leading to a recognised qualification at a higher education and vocational training institute in a different country (developed or developing).

International scholarships for development are fully funded and include government scholarship programs, as part of their official development assistance (ODA) aid funding to developing countries and multilateral development agencies, and non-ODA government and non-government providers.

In this study focusing on the Pacific, scholarships for development fit into 3 categories based on where a student has studied:

- 1) International scholarships – fully funded scholarships for individuals to study outside the Pacific Islands region.
- 2) Regional scholarships – fully funded scholarships for individuals to study in the Pacific Islands region but outside of their home country.
- 3) Local scholarships – fully funded scholarships for individuals to study in their home country.³

Parameters for inclusion in the study

Although SDG 4.b states measuring the ‘number of scholarships available to developing countries’, it was determined that only scholarships awarded and investment dispersed should be counted. The following parameter was included in the data collection approach:

- Scholarships counted have been awarded, and the receiving individual has accepted the offer.

The following countries were the focus for this pilot study:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1) Cook Islands | 2) Fiji |
| 3) Kiribati | 4) Marshall Islands |
| 5) Micronesia, Federated States of | 6) Nauru |
| 7) Niue | 8) Palau |
| 9) Papua New Guinea | 10) Samoa |
| 11) Solomon Islands | 12) Tonga |
| 13) Tuvalu | 14) Vanuatu |

³ While this ‘within country’ aspect of scholarships does not fall within the UN SDG 4.b definition, the study recognises that these scholarships contribute to developing human capital in the Pacific and should be considered part of this monitoring work.

Data collection categories and variables

The data categories and variables included in this pilot study were selected in order to provide a robust means of testing the feasibility of this approach, while limiting the burden on stakeholders to collate the requested information. The data variables and categories included and reported in this pilot were selected based on broad applicability and are summarised in Table 1, and further detailed in Annex 1: Monitoring SDG 4.b pilot data collection template, Table 3.

Table 1: Data collection categories and variables used and reported

DATA CATEGORY	DATA VARIABLE
SCHOLARSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	Scholarship name
	Scholarship funder/donor
TOTAL NUMBER	Country/ies of study
	Total number of scholarships awarded
INCLUSION	Number of scholarships awarded to women
	Number of scholarships awarded to people with disability
PLACE OF STUDY	Number of scholarships awarded to people for international study
	Number of scholarships awarded to people for regional study
	Number of scholarships awarded for in-country study
LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION	Number of scholarships by vocational education and training (VET)
	Number of scholarships by undergraduate degrees
	Number of scholarships by postgraduate degrees
BROAD FIELD OF STUDY	Number of scholarships awarded to individuals by Broad field of study, using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) ⁴

4. Outputs of the study

Rapid scan – scholarships across the Pacific

A rapid online scan in May 2023 identified 62 scholarship awards explicitly seeking applications from citizens of Pacific Island countries. Of these scholarships, 42 were funded by non-Pacific Island donors (government, foundations, etc.), 15 were funded by Pacific Island donors (government, universities, private, etc.), and 5 scholarships by multilateral agencies and organisations.

Donors from outside the Pacific largely orient the reporting available for these awards with limited opportunity to extract and aggregate data from the publicly available

⁴ For further information on ISCED: <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced>

documents published by some of the major government scholarship programs. Within the region, [The Pacific Data Hub](#), which holds data on 132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators selected by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders for monitoring progress against the SDGs, does not include SDG 4.b.

Engaging scholarship stakeholders in the pilot study

Applying the 2-step engagement approach outlined in the previous section, from August to November 2023, the research team contacted 14 Pacific Islands national scholarship coordination units via email, with 9 stakeholders responding to support the study’s purpose and 5 stakeholders contributing data. Early data analysis indicated a disparity in the range and depth of scholarship information available to Pacific Island countries. To fill these data gaps, the research team invited 18 scholarship donors to participate, with 5 stakeholders responding and 3 stakeholders contributing data.

A total of 9 stakeholders, including the initial contribution by DFAT, shared their scholarship data, demonstrating the feasibility of regional scholarships data collaboration (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). These 9 stakeholders provided data that included 26 scholarship programs, which are shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Discussions with stakeholders revealed that many are seeking answers to the same questions—how many are receiving scholarships, where are they studying, what are they studying, where should scholarships be targeted, and how can these individuals be engaged and supported to contribute to development on their return? This shared challenge was expressed as a motivation for contributing data to the pilot study.

Table 2: Scholarship stakeholders contributing data to the pilot study

	STAKEHOLDER	TYPE
1	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Government Funder
2	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Government Funder
3	Association of Commonwealth Universities (UK)	Government Scholarship Manager
4	Fiji Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service	Government Funder and Recipient Country
5	Human Resource Development & Training Unit, Secretariat, Niue Public Service Commission	Recipient Country
6	Human Resource Development, Samoa Public Service Commission	Government Funder and Recipient Country
7	Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority (SITESA)	Government Funder and Recipient Country
8	Scholarships Unit, Tonga Ministry of Education and Training	Government Funder and Recipient Country
9	Micronesia Conservation Trust	Foundation/Philanthropic Funder



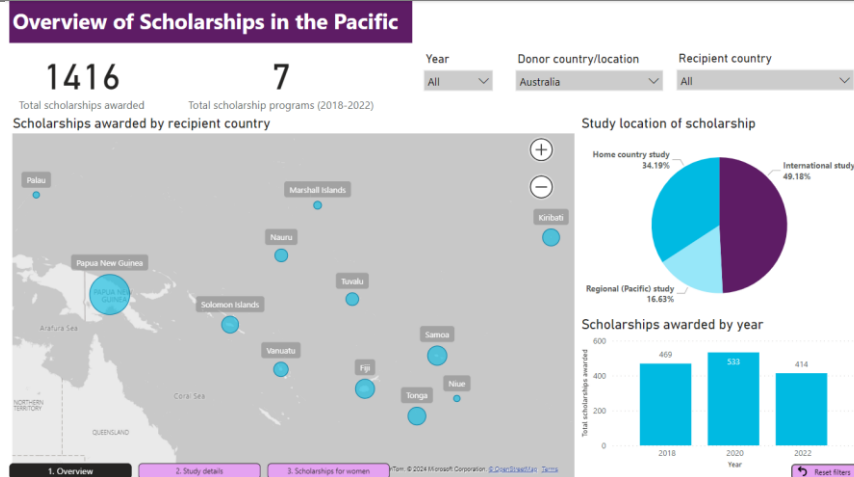
Figure 2: Scholarship programs with data contributing to this project

Interactive data dashboard

The data collected was transformed into a dashboard using Microsoft Power BI that can be filtered by year, donor country/location, and recipient country. This tool allows users to explore the data to conduct analyses and examine the scholarships trends based on their interests.

Page 1: Overview of Scholarships in the Pacific

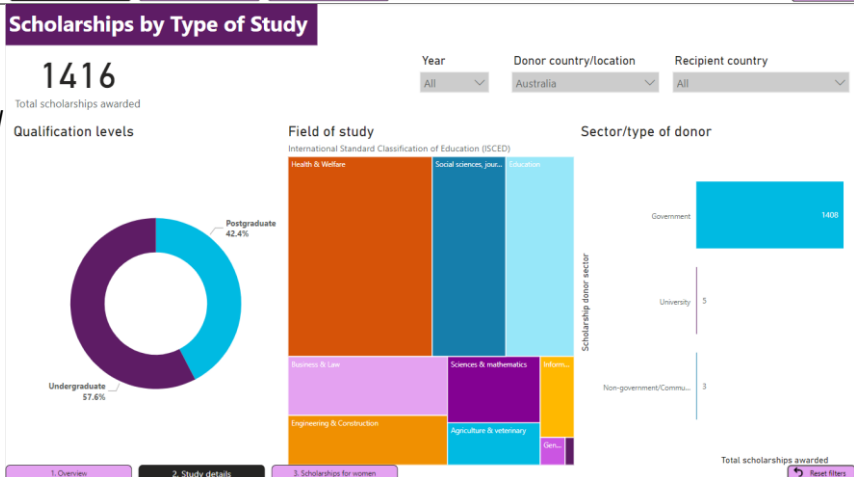
Filtered to scholarships from Australia



Page 2: Scholarships by Type of Study

The types of study and qualifications undertaken

Filtered to scholarships from Australia



Page 3: Scholarships for Women

The distribution of scholarships to women

Filtered to scholarships from Australia

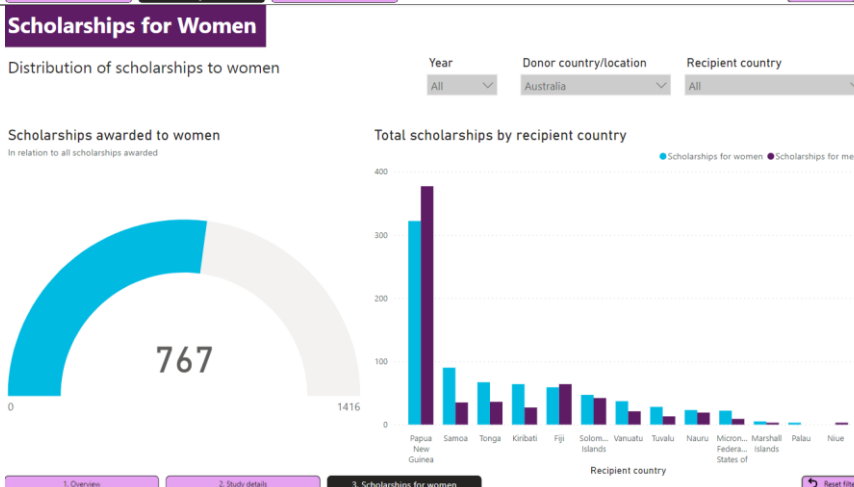


Figure 3: Screenshots of interactive data dashboard

5. Outcomes and recommendations

Outcomes

This pilot study demonstrated the feasibility and value to stakeholders in collating and reporting regional scholarships data and provided new insights into the breadth of awards offered to Pacific Island countries. The data collected for this study showed that in 2022 alone, 18 scholarship programs awarded 6,038 scholarships, with women making up 50% of participants and 12.5% studying outside their home country. Although not a comprehensive collection of scholarship investments in the Pacific, these insights and comparisons of scholarship investments are important and previously unavailable.

However, limitations to the methodology occurred during the data collection which require future consensus by scholarship stakeholders to ensure consistency in the data recorded. These include common agreement on:

- when the scholarship disbursements are recorded (year awarded or the year study began)
- coding Broad Fields of Study to align with the International Standard Classification of Education or another common classification standard
- how to code double degrees without duplicating the scholarship count
- how to record and categorise the mode of study (distance, online, on campus, split site, partially online, etc.)
- how to record equity groups, such as gender, disability and other minority groups.

Furthermore, another issue discovered during the design of the pilot was collecting data that avoided privacy-related issues or the identification of individuals. As a result, the pilot only collected aggregated scholarship data. The trade-off to this approach is the limited ability to conduct cross-analysis of the variables (e.g., the proportion of women by field of study).

Recommendations

The outputs and outcomes of this pilot study highlight future possibilities to improve monitoring of SDG 4.b. The recommendations below are put forward to scholarship donors and Pacific Island countries and are intended to equip these stakeholders with a tool to support planning for future investments in tertiary scholarships.

Table 3: Pilot study recommendations for monitoring SDG 4.b

<p>1. Adopt indicator SDG 4.b.2 to monitor scholarship trends by the number of tertiary-level scholarships awarded by the recipient country and continue this pilot across the Pacific</p>	<p>This pilot study showed the feasibility and greater insight when monitoring SDG 4.b by the number of scholarships awarded. Given that this data collection spans a range of donor and recipient countries, continuing to engage with other scholarship stakeholders and showing the pilot dashboard outcomes may be a way to broaden regional engagement across the Pacific.</p>
<p>2. Build consensus on how scholarships data should be captured</p>	<p>Data collection for this pilot study highlighted a need for scholarship donors and Pacific Island countries to build consensus and consistency in the scholarships data to be collected. For example, characteristics such as broad field of study, mode of study, and details such as how to record double degrees would benefit from alignment, as well as agreement on the level of information shared to support cross-variable analysis (e.g., the proportion of women by field of study).</p>
<p>3. Engage in a Pacific Islands regional scholarships forum</p>	<p>Continuing data collection to extend this dashboard offers a platform for regional scholarships engagement. Feedback in this study showed mutual interest amongst stakeholders to collaboratively address shared challenges to effectively monitor scholarships and ensure the efficiency of targeted investments supporting human capital development.</p>
<p>4. Expand coordinated scholarships data collection to other regions</p>	<p>Major scholarship donors are encouraged to apply this data collection approach to other regions to support development of a global measure of the number of scholarships invested and contribute to the achievement of SDG 4.b— to substantially expand the number of scholarships available to developing countries globally.</p>

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Annex I: Monitoring SDG 4.b pilot data collection template

Table 4: Data collection guidance

Instructions:		
In the worksheets shown in the tabs below - for the years 2018, 2020, 2022 we are seeking contributions to data for scholarships awarded in these years. The data we are seeking is outlined in the 'Data variable' section below, with definitions provided.		
Data category	Data variable	Definitions:
Scholarship characteristics	Scholarship name	Name of the scholarship. Note, please list scholarships separately if more than one scholarship is offered under an overarching scholarship program <i>Example: Australia Awards Scholarships and Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships would be listed separately</i>
	Scholarship funder/donor	Name of the scholarship funder or donor <i>Example: U.S. Department of State</i>
	Country/ies of study	The country or countries where scholarship recipients can study. <i>Example: Australia</i>
By volume (AUD)	\$/Scholarships awarded volume in AUD	The financial volume of scholarships awarded in 2018/2020/2022 by country Reporting is by 5 pre-set ranges. Refer to the section below outlining these categories [row 50] <i>Ranges are: < \$250,000; \$250,000 - \$999,999; \$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999; \$2,000,000 - \$4,999,999; \$5,000,000 +</i>
Total number	#/Scholarships awarded total number	Total number of scholarships awarded in 2018/2020/2022
Inclusion	#/Scholarships awarded to women	Number of scholarships awarded to women in 2018/2020/2022
	#/Scholarships awarded to people with disability	Number of scholarships awarded to people with disability in 2018/2020/2022
Place of study	#/Scholarships awarded to people for international study	Number of scholarships awarded to people undertaking study in a country outside the Pacific Islands region; e.g. New Zealand or Australia
	#/Scholarships awarded to people for regional study	Number of scholarships awarded to people undertaking study in the Pacific Islands region but outside their home country
	#/Scholarships awarded for in-country study	Number of scholarships awarded to people undertaking study in their home country
Level of qualification	#/Level of qualification - Vocational education and training (VET)	Number of scholarships awarded to individuals completing a Vocational education and training (VET) qualification in 2018/2020/2022

		<i>VET qualifications include Certificate III, Certificate IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma</i>
	#/Level of qualification - Undergraduate	Number of scholarships awarded to individuals completing an undergraduate qualification at a higher education institute in 2018/2020/2022
		<i>Undergraduate qualifications include Diploma, Associate Degree, Bachelor Degree</i>
	#/Level of qualification - Postgraduate	Number of scholarships awarded to individuals completing a postgraduate qualification at a higher education institute in 2018/2020/2022
		<i>Postgraduate qualifications include Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree (PhD)</i>
Broad field of study	#/Field of study - 00 Generic programmes/qualifications	Number of scholarships awarded to individuals by Broad field of study, using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). For further information on ISCED: https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced
	#/Field of study - 01 Education	
	#/Field of study - 02 Arts and humanities	
	#/Field of study - 03 Social sciences, journalism and information	
	#/Field of study - 04 Business, administration and law	
	#/Field of study - 05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	
	#/Field of study - 06 Information and communication technologies	
	#/Field of study - 07 Engineering, manufacturing and construction	
	#/Field of study - 08 Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	
	#/Field of study - 09 Health and welfare	
#/Field of study - 10 Services		

	A	B	C	D
1	Receiving country (student nationality)	[e.g. Fiji]	[e.g. Vanuatu]	
2	Scholarship name	[scholarship name]	[scholarship name]	[scholarship name]
3	Scholarship funder/donor			
4	Country/ies of study			
5	\$/Scholarships awarded volume in AUD [select from drop-down in cell]			
6	#/Scholarships awarded total number			
7	#/Scholarships awarded to women			
8	#/Scholarships awarded to people with disability			
9	#/Scholarships awarded to people for international study			
10	#/Scholarships awarded to people for regional study			
11	#/Scholarships awarded for in-country study			
12	#/Level of qualification - Vocational education and training (VET)			
13	#/Level of qualification - Undergraduate (Higher education)			
14	#/Level of qualification - Postgraduate (Higher education)			
15	#/Field of study - 00 Generic programmes/qualifications			
16	#/Field of study - 01 Education			
17	#/Field of study - 02 Arts and humanities			
18	#/Field of study - 03 Social sciences, journalism and information			
19	#/Field of study - 04 Business, administration and law			
20	#/Field of study - 05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics			
21	#/Field of study - 06 Information and communication technologies			
22	#/Field of study - 07 Engineering, manufacturing and construction			
23	#/Field of study - 08 Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary			
24	#/Field of study - 09 Health and welfare			
25	#/Field of study - 10 Services			
26				
27				

◀ ▶ | [READ ME - Instructions](#) | **2018** | 2020 | 2022 | ⊕

Figure 4: Data collection template example