Classes begin in Pakistan’s first school for transgenders

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Curriculum has both academic and vocational training

Pakistan’s first-of-its-kind school for transgenders opened here on Monday to provide education and vocational skills to people from the community.

The Gender Guardian school has been opened by NGO Exploring Future Foundation (EFF) in the Defence Housing Authority area of the city.

The NGO said Lahore — Pakistan’s second-most populous city — has a population of about 30,000 transgender persons.

The school offers a full 12 years of academic education from the primary level to matriculation, its officials said. It also offers practical courses in eight fields, including cooking, fashion designing and cosmetics. “This school has been set up to educate the neglected and oppressed section of the society. It is unfortunate that transgenders are forced to live in isolation since their childhood,” said EFF’s Asif Shahzad, the owner of the school.

No age bar

He said there is no age limit for people to enrol as students in the school, which has 15 faculty members including three transgenders.

“So far 40 transgender persons have been enrolled in the school. This is the only such school in any Islamic country in the world,” he claimed. Mr. Shahzad lamented the fact that parents tried to hide the transgender identity of their children, fearing social stigma. “Such children grow up and start earning a living through singing and dancing. When they grow old, transgender persons beg on the streets,” he said.

Mooeza Tariq, managing director of the NGO, said after that on completion of training, the students will be provided funds and services for setting up of their own businesses.

“Most of the enrolled students have shown interest in the fashion industry, including learning about cosmetics, fashion designing, embroidery and stitching, while some have also shown interest in graphic designing and culinary skills,” Tariq said.