



CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN MADHYA PRADESH (MP)

Working Paper 2: Early Childhood Learning and Access to Education

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Submitted to UNICEF (Bhopal) Office

Abbreviations

ASER	:	Annual Survey of Education Report	NEP	:	National Education Policy
CBR	:	Community-based Rehabilitation	NGOs	:	Non-governmental Organizations
CRC	:	Composite Regional Centres	NIs	:	National Institutes
CSR	:	Corporate Social Responsibility	NPAC	:	National Plan of Action for Children
CWSN	:	Children With Special Needs	NTA	:	National Testing Agency
DDRC	:	District Disability Rehabilitation Centres	PIB	:	Press Information Bureau
DDRS	:	Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme	RCI	:	Rehabilitation Council of India
DIET	:	District Institutes of Education and Training	RPDA	:	Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act
DoEPwD	:	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)	RSUQ	:	Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question
ECCE	:	Early Childhood Care and Education	RTE	:	Right to Education
GIA	:	Grant in Aid	SADD	:	Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregation
GoI	:	Government of India	SBM	:	Swachh Bharat Mission
GoMP	:	Government of Madhya Pradesh	SDG	:	Sustainable Development Goal
HBR	:	Home-Based Rehabilitation	SIDPA	:	Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act
ICDS	:	Integrated Child Development Services	SJED	:	Social Justice and Empowerment Department
ICT	:	Information and communication technology	SSA	:	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
ITI	:	Industrial Training Institute	THR	:	Take-home Ration
LSUQ	:	Lok Sabha Unstarred Question	TLMs	:	Teaching Learning Materials
MICS	:	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys	UDID	:	Unique Disability Identity
MP	:	Madhya Pradesh	UDISE	:	Unified District Information System for Education
NAS	:	National Achievement Survey	UNCRC	:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
NAS	:	National Achievement Survey	UNCRPD	:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
NCERT	:	National Council for Education Research and Training	UNICEF	:	United Nations Children's Fund
NCPEDP	:	National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People	UT	:	Union Territory
NCTE	:	National Council for Teacher Education	WASH	:	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
			WCD	:	Women and Child Development
			WHO	:	World Health Organization

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Children with disabilities in Madhya Pradesh

As per census (2011) there are nearly 4.63 lakh children with disabilities living in Madhya Pradesh¹.

At only 1.46% of child population, it is highly undercounted as an earlier report by World Bank (2007) showed that people with disabilities comprise between 4 and 8 percent of the population in India².

Children with disabilities account for 29.86% of total people with disabilities in the state.

It is important to note that the proportion of females among children with disabilities is reported as only 44% as against the overall proportion of 48%.

A high 71% of the children reside in rural areas, while only 29% in urban areas.

A high proportion (59%) of children with disabilities is reported in the 10 to 19 years age-group; followed by 25% in the age group 5 to 9 years and 16% below 5 years.

Hearing impairment and locomotive disability affects the largest share of these children (18% each); followed by visual impairments (17%), intellectual disability (9%) and speech impairment (6%).

As per the national Unique Disability ID (UDID) portal (2025) around 83,258 of have UDID cards. This includes around 50,371 boys and 32,867 girls.

Introduction

Children with disabilities form a large proportion (29.86%) of the total population of people with disabilities (PwDs) in Madhya Pradesh. It is most crucial that the specific needs of PwDs is met at a younger age- in terms of diagnostics, certification, early intervention, etc. Unfortunately, children with disabilities, more often than not, fall between the cracks. They are neither a priority target group under programmes for children, nor are they a priority target group under programmes targeting PwDs. This leads to a lack of data and research on children with disabilities-a major impediment for evidence-based decision making.

UNICEF (Bhopal), thus proposed to undertake a diagnostic review of the outreach of health, nutrition, and education programmes to children with disabilities in Madhya Pradesh. The review was undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

- ⇒ To highlight the status and concerns for enabling education outcomes for children with disabilities;
- ⇒ To map the specific provisions/ entitlements for children with disabilities under current legal and policy provisions;
- ⇒ To identify programmes and schemes which align with fulfilling the legislative and policy commitments;
- ⇒ To assess the coverage of children with disabilities within key programmes and schemes;

¹ Estimates based on projected population for 2021 and proportion of children with disabilities among total child population in census 2011 comes to around 4.55 lakhs.

² As per World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), globally the proportion of world population with a disability is 15%.

- ⇒ To mark the gaps in coverage, and outline implementation bottlenecks including in budgetary allocations; and
- ⇒ To provide a set of short-term and long-term action areas for improving the coverage and quality of government services.

While acknowledging the importance of preventive measures, community-based rehabilitation (CBR) and civil society efforts; given the resource constraints the diagnostics focused only on rehabilitation measures and core government services for children and PwDs.

The diagnostics is based mostly on secondary literature review using global and nationally available data. State level data has been limited to those provided by state departments and publicly available sources mainly parliament questions and national government reports. Key informant interviews and discussions were held with government officials and service providers including frontline workers, NGO representatives, and parents of children with disabilities. Field visits were conducted in Raisen and Bhopal districts for understanding the grassroot reality.

Right to education and learning

All children have the right to education and learning, as it sets the foundation for their future well-being, enabling pathways to future opportunities and healthier lives. Children with disabilities, are also entitled to this, the same way as any other children. Enabling it requires an inclusive education system that guarantees access, progress and achievement of key learning outcomes. This means addressing all aspects of a child's educational path and eliminating the disparities and barriers that begin early in life, accumulate during childhood and generate further disadvantages for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2021).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC article 24) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD article 25), also recognise this right of access to free and quality education; as well as the right to an inclusive education and attention to individual needs of children with disabilities.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) through Goal 4, also calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Targets within SDG 4, include the call for universal completion of primary and secondary school (target 4.1), elimination of gender disparities and inequities in education, specifically highlighting the need to ensure access to education for persons with disabilities (target 4.5), and ensuring literacy and numeracy skills (target 4.6), among others. Target 4.a calls for the upgrading of educational facilities so that they are child and disability-sensitive and promote inclusive learning environments.

In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDA), 2016 specifically recognises the right to free education and for all educational institutions to provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities. The National Policy of Persons with Disabilities (2006) as well as the National Policy for Children (2013) of the Government of India (GoI), both mandate the need to focus on equal rights and education for children with disability. The National Plan of Action for Children (2016) also endorses the need to focus on education of children with disabilities.

Education status of children with disabilities and challenges to access

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of education, children with disabilities face multiple obstacles to realizing their right to education. Indications from available reports (UNICEF, 2022), shows that children with disabilities not only miss out on early learning, but are also more likely to never attend school or drop out in the very early stages of primary education.

Most children miss out on early learning. Children with disabilities receive less early stimulation and responsive care and have less exposure to children's books and toys than children without

disabilities. Global data in terms of engagement in four or more activities to provide early stimulation and responsive care, shows that only 36% of children aged 24–59 months with one or more functional difficulties, and 31% of children with two or more functional difficulties, had access, compared with 50% of children with no functional difficulties (UNICEF, 2021).

Children with disabilities are also 25% less likely to attend early childhood education programmes (ibid) and even if they do obtain access, their specific needs are often overlooked. Globally only 19% of children aged 3–4 years with one or more functional difficulties are reported to be attending an early childhood education programme, compared with 27% of children without functional difficulties (ibid). The disparity is even more pronounced among girls (ibid). One systematic review (Vargas-Barón, Emily, et al., 2019) of early childhood intervention and early childhood development programmes showed that 61% of service providers surveyed identified a lack of services for at-risk children and children with developmental delays, disabilities, or behavioural or mental health needs; and 47% reported a lack of capacity to meet demand.

During field visits conducted as part of the study, also it was observed that even when children with disabilities are enrolled at the anganwadi centres and receive take-home-ration (THR), they do not stay at the centre or participate in any activity related to early learning. The anganwadi workers and supervisors also reported not being able to handle such children both due to lack of infrastructure as well as human resource limitations.

While recognising the conversion of anganwadi centres as early learning centres in India itself is relatively new and progressing, there seems to be no consideration of how children with disabilities would be included as part of the system. Discussions with officials of the department of women and child development (WCD) at state and district level revealed limited capacities within the system to address the needs of children with disabilities.

A review of UDISE+ data from last three years shows that less than a thousand children with special needs are enrolled at pre-primary level, with the proportion of girls being much lower than that of boys (figure 1). In 2023-24 only 41% of those enrolled were girls.

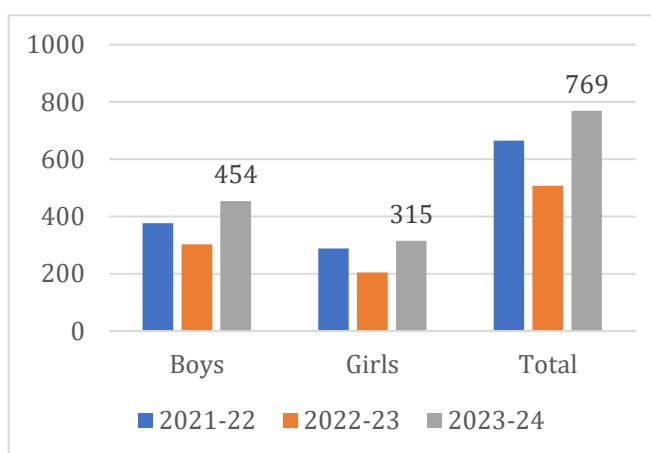


Figure 1: Pre Primary Enrolment of Children with Special Needs in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + 2020-21, 2022-23 and 2023-24)

Enrolment in primary school is also a major challenge. Reports (UNICEF, 2021) show that around the world, children with disabilities are 49% more likely to have never attended school and 47% more likely to be out of primary school than those without any disability. Children who have difficulties caring for themselves, communicating and hearing are most likely to have never attended school (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020).

As per census of India (2011) in the state of Madhya Pradesh, there were 23% children with disabilities in the age-group 5 to 19 years who has never attended schools (also see table 1). In fact, the cohort of “never attended schools” forms the highest proportion of those not attending schools- 63% of boys and 66% of girls, highlighting that enrolment in schools is a much greater challenge.

Table 1: Status of Children with Disabilities Attending Schools in Madhya Pradesh

Parameters	Male	Female	Total
Children with Disability aged 5 to 19 years	221012	168127	389139
Attending educational institution	140675	108332	249007
<i>Percentage of children with disabilities</i>	63.65	64.43	63.99
Not Attending educational institution	80337	59795	140132
Currently Not Attending	29995	20182	50177
Never attended	50342	39613	89955
<i>Percentage of those not attending</i>	62.66	66.25	64.19

Source: Census, 2011

This fact was also highlighted multiple times by all stakeholders during the various discussions. Parents and civil society groups repeated stated that even though it was mandatory for schools to accept children with disabilities into the system, school especially non-government schools were highly reluctant to provide admissions to children with disabilities. The major cause cited by the schools was the limited capacities in terms of staff, training or equipment or infrastructure to address the specific needs of such children. In one case, it was shared that the school actually put a condition of on the parents to provide a full time care taker at school before giving admission to the child.

The situation is not great even today as only 1,46,932 children with special needs (CWSN) were enrolled in schools (from class I to XII) in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE+, 2023-24). In terms of percentage, this comes to around 32% of the total children with disabilities in the age group 5 to 19 years as per census 2011. More disturbing is the fact that the numbers of absolute enrolment in elementary schools has almost stabilised in the last two years (figure 2). Gender disparities also persist with only 44.8% of those enrolled in 2023-24 being girls, a trend which is observed throughout the last many years. This highlights the need for the state government to increase focus on enrolment of children with disabilities in schools, especially for girls with disabilities.

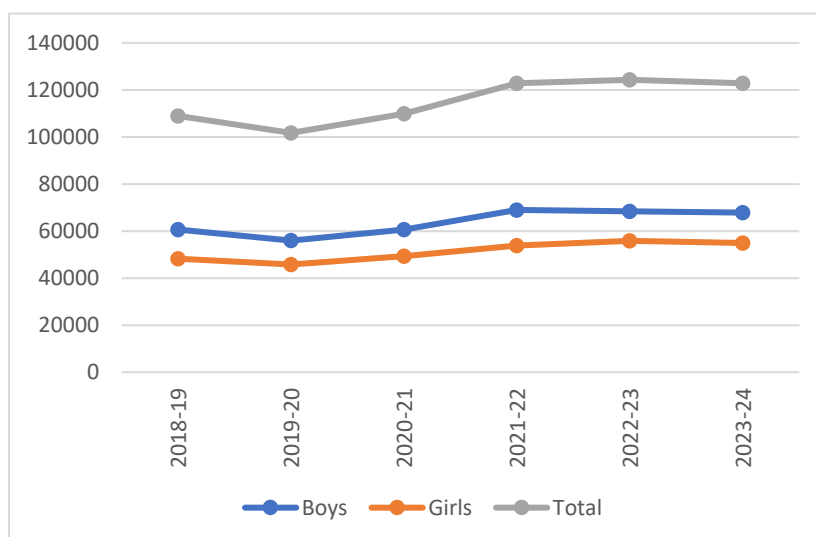


Figure 2: Enrolment of Children with Special Needs in Elementary Schools in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + multiple years)

Access to special schooling is also limited. In Madhya Pradesh, there were only 346 special schools (UDISE+, 2021-22) for the 4.55 lakh³ children with disabilities which comes to around 1315 students per school. Most special schools, however have a capacity ranging from 20 to 350 only, highlighting the gap in supply. Further studies (NCERT, 2013) at national level also show that often disability itself is reported as the main reason for not attending any special schools for both boys (32.5%) and girls (30.8%) – this further speaks of deficiencies and inadequacy of special schooling methods.

³ Estimates based on projected population for 2021 and proportion of children with disabilities among total child population in census 2011 comes to around 4.55 lakhs.

Drop out levels in elementary seems to be improving.

Even once in the education system, children with disabilities face a higher risk of repeating a grade or dropping out of primary school. This is due to multiple barriers, including stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020). Studies (Gupta, 2016) also highlight that in India, dropout of children with special needs starts mainly from class V onwards.

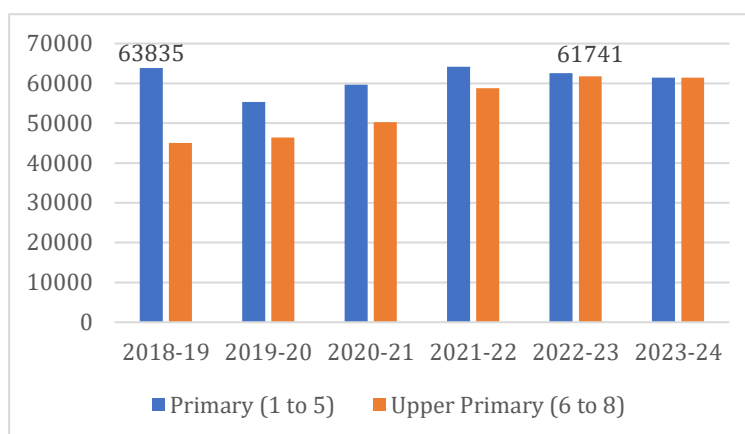


Figure 3: Break-up of children with special needs enrolled in primary and upper primary over the years in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + multiple years)

Data from the state, however shows that once enrolled in schools, retention is ensured at least at the elementary level. As can be seen from figure 3, the enrolment in upper primary has increased and at par with that in primary since 2022-23. Considering the education period of 5 years, it is interesting to see that the number of children in three classes of upper primary (6 to 8 years) in 2022-23 is almost 96.71% that of children enrolled in five classes of primary school in 2018-19. Interestingly, the trend holds true for both boys and girls, pointing to the fact that enrolment rather than retention is a major challenge for education of children with disabilities in the state.

The transition at secondary level is still a challenge. Out-of-school rates increases during secondary school and are higher among children with multiple disabilities, and highest among children with severe disabilities. Children of lower-secondary-school age with difficulties caring for themselves, communicating and concentrating are up to four times more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities. Global data shows that 21% and 35% children one functional difficulty were out of lower and upper secondary schools as compared to 16% and 28% children without functional difficulties (UNICEF, 2021). A national level study (Gupta, 2016) in India, revealed that the education system is retaining only 12.02% children with special needs enrolled in class I to class XII.

The situation is not very different in Madhya Pradesh, where UDISE+ data shows a significantly lower number of children with special need enrolled in lower and higher secondary schools (figure 4).

Interestingly, the gender disparity in higher secondary education (with 47% of girls enrolled) was lower than that in secondary (with 45.8% of girls enrolled) in 2023-24.

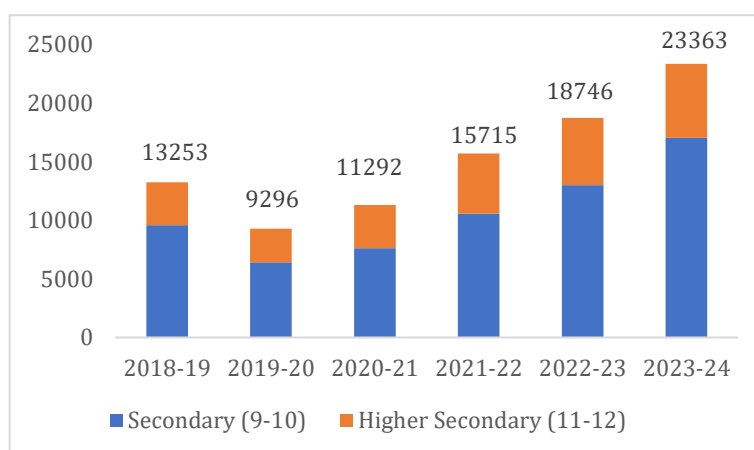


Figure 4: Enrolment of Children with Special Needs in Schools at secondary levels in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + multiple years)

Learning outcomes are also often lower. Disparities affecting school attendance of children with and without disabilities also tend to increase as children move into higher levels of education. Children

with disabilities are also substantially less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills than children without disabilities. As per global reports (UNICEF, 2021)

- ⇒ 21% of children with one or more functional difficulties have foundational reading skills, compared with 32% of children without functional difficulties. Children with difficulties communicating, learning and remembering are least likely to have foundational reading skills.
- ⇒ For foundational numeracy skills, these rates are 10% for children with functional difficulties and 17% for children without functional difficulties. Children with difficulties remembering, learning and caring for themselves are least likely to demonstrate foundational numeracy skills.
- ⇒ Even fewer children possess both foundational reading and numeracy skills – only 7% of children with functional difficulties compared with 13% of children without functional difficulties.

Disparities in the achievement of foundational skills increase as children grow older. In terms of learning outcomes, children with disabilities are substantially less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills than children without disabilities.

Unfortunately, data on learning outcomes of children with disabilities in India is not available at national or state level. However, Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) does not collect data from children with disabilities, citing time and resource constraints. While the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2017 conducted by the state-run National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) did collect disability data, it did not report this data in the State Report Cards (Tanushree Sarkar, 2020).

Schools are not equipped to deal with specific needs of children with disabilities. Schools and classrooms are often not accessible to children with disabilities, either physically or because they lack specialized teaching, contributing to lower academic achievement, including dropout and repetition of grades.

According to members of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), less than 1% of the country's total number of educational institutions are disabled-friendly (Aggarwal, 2024). Many buildings are old, so the new norms don't apply to them, making them fail to meet disabled-friendly standards. Children with autism and cerebral palsy, as well as disabled girls, are the least likely to be enrolled in school. Less than 40% of school buildings have ramps, and approximately 17% have accessible restrooms (ibid).

Box 1: Inaccessible sanitation facilities in schools a huge deterrent to attendance

Inaccessible water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools create barriers for children with disabilities to attend and participate in schools, resulting in poor educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2013). Participatory researches, in other countries show children frequently highlighting the importance of a clean environment and hygienic toilets (UNICEF, 2022). For children with disabilities, too the issues of privacy and accessibility are paramount and they have also reported trying to reduce their consumption to minimize the need to go to the toilet. This has potentially harmful implications on their health.

This is particularly an issue for girls with disabilities, who must also manage menstrual hygiene. Girls tend to miss school when school-based facilities are not accessible or when they are unable to physically manage their own menstrual hygiene and there is not a caregiver at the school who is able or willing to help (Quint, Elizabeth H, 2008).

Reports from Madhya Pradesh, also shows schools, hostels and transport systems as not being accessible and safe; lack of disabled friendly toilets; lower number of teachers trained on sign language; etc. Field visits to special schools and hostels for children with disabilities highlighted how even a hostel run by the education department for visually impaired students did not have tactile flooring and step-free access. The situation was much better at the residential school run by the SJED. Furthermore, the situation is improving as teaching learning material and other equipments in both

the hostel and residential school was widely available. Availability of trained teachers and special educators, especially for science and maths, however, is still a major challenge. (Also see section on [inclusive education](#) for more details).

Limited focus on children below benchmark disabilities (above 40%). Accessing education is a challenge for all children with disabilities and not limited to those with benchmark disabilities. For instance, children with myopia who do not have access to diagnostic services and glasses will have difficulty seeing, but not be assessed as one with benchmark disability. While the education department does recognise the need to focus on all children with special needs, ground realities reveal differently. The focus of even special schools seems to be on getting children enrolled under UDID for admissions. It is important for schools to focus and collaborate on enabling access to assistive devices, technology and services, as well as exposure to nurturing relationships and positive social norms and beliefs, are crucial to promoting the inclusion of all children, regardless of their level of impairment.

Information and communication technology (ICT) for children with disabilities is still a neglected aspect. Access to ICT can facilitate learning and strengthen the positive aspects of education, bringing with it the subsequent benefits that a good education can provide. While all children can benefit from using ICT, the advantages for children with disabilities are even more pronounced. Access to ICT can facilitate communication and interaction, especially for play and education, supporting the child's social development. Substantial evidence suggests that using ICT can also help students with disabilities learn in more inclusive ways by enabling access to technologies and resources that are not otherwise available (Adam, Tas, and Arthur Tatnall, 2017). In addition to providing additional tools for learning, ICT can help children with disabilities to communicate with their teachers and peers more readily, building stronger social skills and networks (Chantry, Jane, and Carolyn Dunford, 2010). Digital technologies have allowed some children with disabilities to learn, play, communicate and access information in ways that would otherwise be impossible for them. However, inadequate device or interface designs, inaccessible digital content due to structure or language, insufficient training for teachers and students, a lack of awareness of or an unaffordability of digital technologies and related assistive technology, all result in vast numbers of children with disabilities having no access to the digital world, while some have substantial restrictions in their access (UNICEF, 2022).

Given how empowering information, communication and digital technologies can be, when these are designed and deployed in a way that excludes children with disabilities, they amplify the inequity that exists between them and children without disabilities. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data (UNICEF, 2022) however indicates that adolescents with disabilities report lower use of mobile phones, with 57% of adolescents aged 15–17 years with one or more functional difficulties saying they have used a mobile phone during the previous three months, compared with 67% of adolescents without functional difficulties. The same data show only a negligible difference for the use of computers (12% of children without functional difficulties compared with 11% of children with disabilities) and the use of the internet (20% of children without and 18% of children with).

Unfortunately, there are few to nil studies on the usage and effectiveness of digital technologies and related assistive technologies by children with disabilities in the context of Madhya Pradesh or even India. Although it was found that an NGO in Bhopal (Arushi) with support from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds was running a programme to provide digital access. Even government run special schools had a well-equipped computer lab in place. However, teachers to train children with disabilities in use of digital technologies were not available. This is one area of intervention which needs to be focused on by the government.

Stimulating home environments and nurturing relationships is also lacking. The knowledge, attitudes, expectations and skills of caregivers are key in determining the amount and quality of stimulation experienced by children. However, parents of children with disabilities have been found to have lower expectations of their child's reading and writing abilities, which leads to lower support

to enable better learning outcomes. This was also found true, in the context of the state, during the field visits and key informant interviews. A particular disturbing fact was that some of the parents were more interested in getting pensions for the children with disabilities and not so much on support for education and learning to empower and enable their children. Further, even when parents are supportive, they lack the necessary skills to provide individualised and specialised attention to children with disabilities for improving their learning outcomes.

Intersectionalities further adds to exclusion. The situation is further amplified for children with disabilities, who experience additional discrimination and exclusion based on the intersection of gender (girls with disabilities are more neglected), location (those in remote locations and rural areas) and other marginalized identities (like belonging to scheduled caste or scheduled tribe communities). For instance, figures for women with disabilities were consistently found to be lower than for men with disabilities among the persons with disabilities. (Women with Disabilities India Network, 2012). The gap also continues among different disabilities. For instance, lowest educational enrolment and attainment are found among persons with multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities, speech and hearing disabilities primarily due to communication barriers and the absence of a congenial learning environment; and among these marginal categories within the disability spectrum (ibid).

The impact of excluding children with disabilities from education goes far beyond diminished educational outcomes. They are also more likely to miss out on school-based health and nutrition programmes, such as school meals (Groce, Nora, Eleanor Challenger, and Marko Kerac, 2013) and immunization campaigns (O'Neill, Jenny, et al., 2019), and face increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation while not at school (Banks, Lena Morgon, et al., 2017). Unfortunately, few to nil research studies are available in the context of India to understand the health and nutrition implications of being out-of-school for children with disabilities. However, given that India has one of the largest school-based meal programs (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman), it is important to assess the coverage of children with disabilities in the same, as also the options to include them as part of the same.

Legislations and policies enabling education for children with disabilities

The Right to Education (RTE), 2005

The RTE Act, mandates compulsory education for everyone till primary school. It includes specific provision for children with disability to have the same rights to pursue free and compulsory elementary education, while also providing the option for right to opt for home-based education for children with “multiple disabilities”. There are specific provisions for children with disabilities also included in state RTE rules of Madhya Pradesh. The 2012 RTE amendment also has provisions for children with disabilities to be enrolled in neighbourhood schools and recognizes a separate category, children with severe disabilities, who can opt for home-based education.

National Policy of Persons with Disabilities, 2006

The National Policy of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 endorses the right to development with dignity and equality for children with disabilities along with focus on educational rehabilitation including vocational education. For education of children focus is laid on (i) identification of children with disabilities through regular surveys, (ii) their enrolment in appropriate schools and their continuation till they successfully complete their education; (iii) providing right kind of learning material and books to the children with disabilities; (iv) suitably trained and sensitized teachers and schools which are accessible and disabled friendly; (v) providing scholarships to students with disabilities for pursuing studies especially at post school level; (vi) special schools to be appropriately remodelled and reoriented based on technological development; and (vii) facilities for technical and vocational

education designed to inculcate and bolster skill development suited to various types of productive activities.

National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, 2013

The GoI adopted the National ECCE Policy in 2013, recognizing the importance of investing in early childhood development. The policy to ensure (a) universal access to integrated services towards fulfilment of right to free, universal pre-primary education, and (b) comprehensive childcare supports, infrastructure and services aimed at holistic well-being of children and responsive to their developmental needs along the continuum of care from conception to age six. The responsibility of access to ECCE is envisaged mainly through the erstwhile Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and in convergence with other relevant sectors/ programmes in public channel as well as through other service providers viz. the private and non-governmental.

The policy recognises that discrimination and inequities based on gender, social identity, disability and other exclusionary factors need to be addressed proactively. It also emphasises the need to ensure inclusion of all children and for measures to be undertaken for early detection and interventions with appropriate adaptations and referrals where necessary, for children at risk of developmental delays and disabilities. This is envisaged through appropriate linkages with concerned programmes/ sectors to facilitate participation of children with special needs in the ECCE programmes.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDA), 2016

The RPDA, specifically recognises the right to free education and for all educational institutions funded or recognised by government to provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities. It states that “Notwithstanding anything contained in the Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, every child with benchmark disability between the age of six to eighteen years shall have the right to free education in a neighbourhood school, or in a special school, of his choice”. It also specifies the need for government and the local authorities to take measures to ensure that children with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others. The RPDA also mandates that educational institutions must “provide reasonable accommodation according to the individual’s requirements and provide the necessary support, individualized or otherwise, in environments that maximize academic and social development consistent with the goal of full inclusion.” However, according to the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy review published in May 2020, the terms “reasonable accommodation,” “individualized support,” and “full inclusion” have not been defined, leaving room for arbitrary implementation (Aggarwal, 2024).

National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) 2016

The NPAC also mandates the need to focus on disabled children, also including among other targets related to the percentage of disabled children covered under any government benefit/scheme. There has been a specific focus on education through scholarships, hostels, etc. The plan also includes the need for sports facilities for children with disabilities.

National Education Policy (NEP), 2020⁴

NEP has been hailed as a new era in educational reforms in India and asserts that children with disabilities need to have opportunities for equal participation across the educational system. The recommendations include non-discrimination in schools, accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, individualized supports, use of Braille and Indian Sign language in teaching, and monitoring among others. The policy has provisions for recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training and incorporates disability awareness within teacher education. The NEP also recognises – neighbourhood schools, special schools, and home-based education – as options for the

⁴ This section derives heavily from the blog of Tanushree Sarkar on “Examining Disability Inclusion in India’s New National Education Policy”, 2020

education of children with disabilities, thereby attempting to resolve the ambiguities around school choice.

As per the NEP, schools within a 5-10-kilometer radius will be consolidated within one school complex. The document states that this will help ensure there are adequate resources for children with disabilities including resource centres and special educators. This seeks to solve a key problem for children with disabilities – there is a grave shortage of special educators. Block-level special educators often are required to cover children across 150 schools and travel long distances to make sure all children with disabilities are catered to in their blocks.

However, for parents, school distance is an important consideration for school choice. Parents of children with disabilities have safety concerns with transportation; in some cities, mothers often attend schools with their children to ensure safety and well-being – usually paying for the expenses on their own. While the RPWD provides for transportation for children with high support needs and their attendants, data indicates that transportation allowance or services are often not dispensed. Thus, there is a real danger that school complexes, in their intention to rationalize resources and ensure greater individualized resources and support may inadvertently lower attendance and enrolment of children with disabilities. Another concern with school complexes and resource centres within them is that they might lead to segregation, with children with disabilities taken out of regular classrooms during school hours or entirely excluded.

The NEP also includes special schools as an option for children with benchmark disabilities. However, it is unclear whether the newly re-named Ministry of Education will regulate special schools as regular schools or whether they will continue to fall under the ambit of the Ministry of Social Justice and Welfare (MSJE). Not recognizing special schools as schools shortchanges children with disabilities – there are no clear guidelines around quality, curriculum, certification, or infrastructure. It reinforces the idea of parallel, segregated school systems for some instead of a common schooling system for all. These division further shifts “social inclusion towards a charitable model of social isolation”.

The current mechanisms for regulating special schools often fall short as the RPDA has little power to enforce standards; only education authorities can derecognize schools for non-compliance. Thus, progressive provisions for children with disabilities in the NEP might not apply to special schools. For example, there is unlikely to be publicly available information about infrastructure, resources, and academic standards in special schools, all of which the NEP purports will build regular schools as “vibrant institutions of excellence.” The NEP also pushes for Indian Sign Language to be standardized as a language for teaching deaf children – however, without the Ministry of Education oversight of special schools, it is unclear whether this would apply to schools for deaf children, which often emphasize lip-reading and speech therapy over teaching sign language. At the same time, the place of special schools within the policy framework that argues for inclusive education continues to be tenuous.

The NEP also states that home-based education will be audited based on the norms in the RPWD. An audit of home-based education is essential as there are concerns about how children are identified to receive this provision and the quality of education provided to them. Block-level special educators have highlighted several challenges they faced in providing home-based education, including time and resource constraints, cultural norms and safety, and lack of clear curriculum and assessments.

The NEP addresses several aspects of teacher education, preparation, and service conditions that are relevant for children with disabilities. These include short-term specialization courses to teach children with disabilities and modules on teaching children with disabilities within existing programs. Moreover, teachers will be provided greater autonomy in selecting pedagogical tools relevant to their classroom contexts and will no longer be required to perform non-teaching tasks. Teachers will be trained to recognize and identify disabilities, particularly specific learning disabilities. Non-teaching responsibilities and teacher shortages often prevent teachers from fulfilling teaching responsibilities

towards children without disabilities such that children with disabilities appear to be a burden and a distraction in the classroom.

The policy does not prescribe regularizing special educators as teachers, but views special education as a specialization for general teachers. Government special educators face incredible challenges – they are often hired in contract positions, have low pay, and endure working conditions that they describe as hostile and exploitative. An important policy consideration is the proposal for greater consonance between the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) to ensure that special educators have both content and pedagogical knowledge, a gap that both teachers and special educators have identified.

The policy states that curricular changes will be made in consultation with national institutes under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. This is a positive step if it ensures that issues of accessibility and inclusion are not viewed as problems to solve for after the core has been designed, such that disabled children need to adjust or fit to a system not designed for them. Instead, the curriculum is designed to be flexible, considers individual differences as strengths, and offers multiple means of engagement, assessments, and representation of knowledge.

The NEP emphasizes accountability standards based on learning outcomes over inputs. This includes tracking learning outcomes as part of a National Assessment Centre known as PARAKH, which means to test or evaluate, where students will be assessed at grades 3, 5, and 8. Examinations for grade 3 will be crucial in determining the success of the mission towards foundational literacy and numeracy. PARAKH will also be a part of school accountability and standards, such that all schools will make their assessment data publicly available. Until PARAKH is established, this will be done through the existing NAS. The policy states that PARAKH will ensure accessible assessment guidelines for children with learning disabilities. This further marginalizes children with intellectual disabilities and other cognitive disabilities, who do not find a place in the NEP. It is also unclear how the National Testing Agency (NTA), that will conduct aptitude tests for college admissions and pre-service teacher education, will be made accessible to children with different disabilities.

Programmes and schemes impacting access to education

The Department of school education and literacy, tribal welfare (in tribal districts) and higher education, are mainly responsible for enabling access to education in Madhya Pradesh. Furthermore, there are also residential schools and scholarship programmes run specifically for different types of disabilities by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (SJED). The nodal Ministry for overseeing the ECCE programmes and services is the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India, encompasses care and education for children from conception to six years, with a focus on pre-primary education, play-based learning and holistic development. Universal access to ECCE is mainly envisaged through the government run anganwadi centres, although the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also supports setting up of ECCE/pre-school centres, attached to primary schools. The Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme also offers care and education services for children below 6 years of age. Additionally, there are private service providers both organized and unorganised which provide ECCE, with a steadily spreading outreach especially in urban areas.

Field visit in one district of Madhya Pradesh as part of the study, however revealed that, while the Anganwadi worker is well aware of the children with disabilities in the neighbourhood, they have received no trainings on addressing their learning needs. Even the Anganwadi Protocol for Divyang Children, was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (GoI) in November 2023, focuses more on nutritional needs of children with disabilities and not so much on learning needs. In

fact, children with disabilities are not even kept full time at the anganwadi centre- only brought to the centre for weighing and have access to take-home ration (THR). There are also no specific toys or learning devices available at anganwadi centre. Running in small areas, it is difficult for the centre to retain and care for children with disabilities.

It is not surprising thus that enrolment of children with special needs in the state is still very low. Further even the limited enrolment is more favourable to boys than girls and to those with visual impairments than other types of disabilities (figure 5).

It is very important for the state to focus on early childhood care and learning for children with

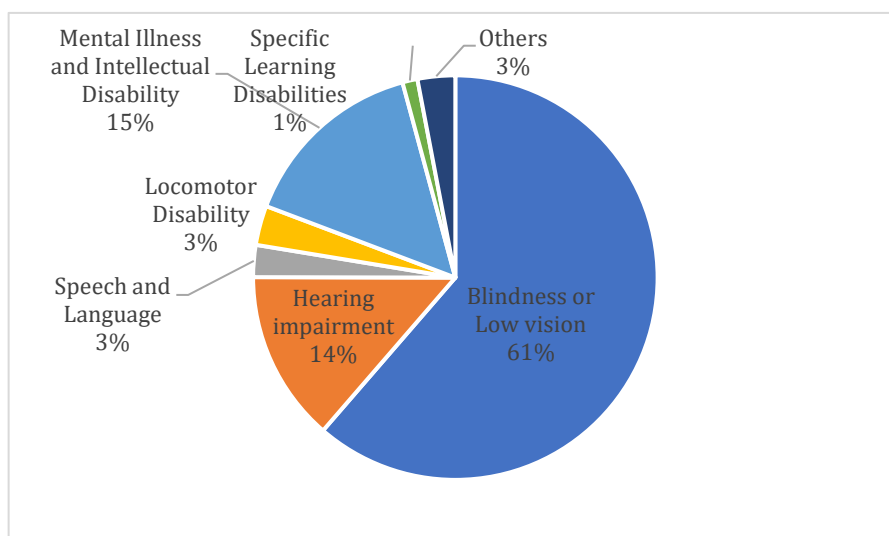


Figure 5: Enrolment in Pre-primary education in Madhya Pradesh by type of disability (UDISE + 2021-22)

disabilities. It needs mentioning here though the even otherwise the outreach of ECCE through anganwadi in the state is still limited. Anganwadi centres are more associated with Poshan than learning and the state is working towards increasing the later through provision of teaching learning material and increasing the educational requirements for anganwadi workers. As per the revised SSA norms the education department, is also providing up to Rs. 2 lakh per school for human resource deployment, other teaching learning aids/ materials for the school; up to Rs. 1 lakh per school once in 5 years for BALA Features, Child friendly furniture, outdoor play etc. Up to Rs. 500/ per child per annum for Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) for indigenous toys and games, play based activities. However, there are no specific provisions for children with disabilities included in the same. Given that ECCE programme itself is still in the building phase, however, it is a crucial opportunity to include elements that promote inclusion and access for children with disabilities.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)

In 2003, the amalgamated Central Sector Scheme "Scheme to Promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disabilities" was renamed as Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS). The scheme has since been revised multiple times with the latest guidelines effective from 1st of October, 2024. The approach of this scheme is to provide financial assistance to voluntary organizations to make available the whole range of services necessary for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, including early intervention, development of daily living skills, education and training. Provisions of Home-Based Rehabilitation (HBR) and Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) have been kept in all projects except two newly started projects. Different types of model projects are supported under DDRS, with a few targeted specifically for children with disabilities (table 2).

Table 2: Model projects under DDRS and typical entitlements

Sr. No.	Model project	Target Group	Typical Entitlements
1.	Cross Disability Pre-Schools and Early Intervention with	Infants and children up to 6 years of age	Prepare the children for their schooling in special schools and/or integration at the

	provision for HBR and CBR projects.		appropriate stage in regular schools for inclusive education. Classes for at least 6 hours with hot cooked meals
2.	Special School for the children with Hearing Disability with option for HBR and CBR projects.	5-18 years of age	- Provide for residential as well as non-residential care to acquire skills for basic activities of daily living - Development of language and communication skills and academics - Classes for at least 6 hours with hot cooked meals - Teacher-pupil ratio is kept at 1:8 - Transport allowance, Stipend and Hostel Maintenance
3.	Special School for the children with Visual Disability (including Deaf blindness) with option for HBR and CBR projects and Low Vision Centre Project.	5-18 years of age	- Provide for residential as well as non-residential care to acquire skills for basic activities of daily living - Development of communication skills and development of other sensory abilities - Classes for at least 6 hours with hot cooked meals - Teacher-pupil ratio ranges from 1:8 to 1:15 - Transport allowance, Stipend and Hostel Maintenance
4.	Special School for the children with other disabilities (ID/CP/ASD/MD/ Muscular Dystrophy, Deaf blindness etc) with option for HBR and CBR projects.	5-23 years of age	- Provide for residential as well as non-residential care to acquire skills for basic activities of daily living - Expected to bring about behavioural changes and enhancement of their cognitive abilities - Teacher-pupil ratio is kept at 1:4 - Attendant-pupil ratio is kept at 1:8 - Transport allowance, Stipend and Hostel Maintenance
5.	Preparatory / Remediation Centre for Children with Specific Learning Disabilities to continue Inclusive Education Project.	3 to 18 years of age	Learning the lagging concepts by using alternative education methods like remedial teaching, reconstructive teaching etc and enabled to continue the inclusive education.
6.	Cross-Disability Therapy and Counselling Center	No age bar	Assist children and adults with any type of disability (as specified in RPwD Act, including Acid-Attack victims) for their therapeutic or counselling needs

As per the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DoEPwD) Annual Report of 2023-24, there were 12 DDRS projects being supported in Madhya Pradesh. All the projects seem to be targeted for children with disabilities, as is reflected from the data on beneficiaries reported by DoEPwD to the Lok Sabha (table 3).

Table 3: Beneficiaries under DDRS in Madhya Pradesh over the years

Details	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total number of beneficiaries¹	822	682	803	764
Number of beneficiaries children²	822	682	803	NA
Percentage of child beneficiaries	100%	100%	100%	NA

Source: 1. DoEPwD Annual Report (2023-24); 2. LSUQ No 2048 (2023)

The number of beneficiaries covered under DDRS depends highly on the Grant in Aid (GIA) released to the state. IT is good to note that this has been steadily increasing over the years for the state of Madhya Pradesh (figure 6). Data on actual utilization for the state is not available, however at the national level the standing committee on social justice and empowerment for the 18th Lok Sabha in its [report of 2024-25](#) has pointed out that “While the DDRS has made progress in reaching its targets, there are significant challenges in fund utilization and physical achievements. The Committee note that there were variations in actual expenditure, as only

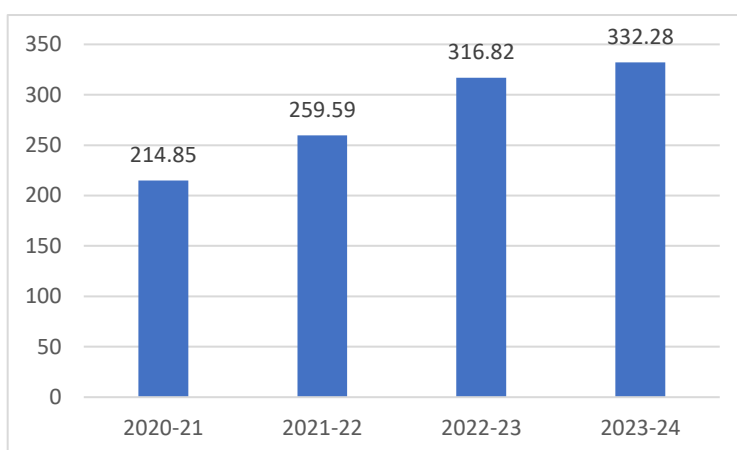


Figure 6: Funds released in last few years under DDRS scheme to Madhya Pradesh (amount in lakh rupees)

Source: LSUQ NO 3008

56 per cent utilized in 2022-23 and 15 per cent utilized as of November 2024 for 2024-25, indicating inefficiencies in fund disbursement and implementation. The Committee would like to recommend that the Department enhance fund utilization efficiency by streamlining the disbursement process and implementing real-time tracking mechanisms.” The committee has also recommended strengthening the monitoring and reporting systems. The state government should undertake a more active role towards this. With no state-level studies to review the status of the DDRS in the state, it is important to understand the status of implementation of DDRS scheme in the Madhya Pradesh better. The SJED should undertake a specific research project towards understanding the status of fund utilization and quality of implementation of DDRS in the state.

Inclusive education under Samagra Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)

The Department of School Education and Literacy has formulated the Samagra Shiksha - an Integrated Scheme for School Education as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme and it is being implemented throughout the country with effect from the year 2018-19. The programme subsumes the three erstwhile Centrally Sponsored Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Teacher Education. It is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class XII and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education. It envisages the ‘school’ as a continuum from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels. The main emphasis of the scheme is on improving quality of school education and the strategy for all interventions would be to enhance the learning outcomes at all levels of schooling.

The scheme specifically focuses on inclusive education and includes various components⁵ including (a) recurring grant of Rs 3500 per year per CWSN, including aids and appliances, teaching material, etc; (b) provision of stipend of Rs 200 per month for 10 months for CWSN girls in addition to student component from pre-primary to senior secondary level; (c) Rs. 10000 per camp at block level for early identification of disabilities for all categories of disabilities defined under the RPD Act; (d) Up to Rs. 500 per day per teacher for training for special educators and block resource persons; (e) Provision for Home-based education (linked to NIOS/SIOS, where possible) for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools within the student-oriented component (SOC); and (e) a non-recurring grant of Rs 2 lakh (once in 5 years) per block resource centre for equipping them with equipment for rehabilitation and special training of CWSN.

This requires an allocation of around 82.20 crores of annual grant, or 1.6% of the total SSA budget of 5100 crores in 2024-25 (table 4).

Table 4: Funds required under SSA for inclusive education

Particulars	Units Costs	Unit Cost Description	Units	Unit Description	Total (in crore rupees)
Recurring Grant	3500	Per student per year	146932	Number of CWSN Enrolled	51.43
Stipend for CWSN girls	2000	Per girl student for 10 months	66096	Number of Girls CWSN Enrolled	13.22
Identification camps at block level	10000	Per block	313	Number of Blocks	0.31
Training for special educators and Block resource persons	500	Per Teacher	319763	50% of teachers in all management categories	15.99
Non-Recurring Grant	200000	Per block	63	20% of all block resource centres	1.25
TOTAL					82.20

Source: Calculations by author based on SSA provisions

Unfortunately, the details of what is actually allocated for inclusive education under SSA is not available in public domain. It is important for the school education department to track the allocations made to CWSN separately and report the same annually. It would also be good to allocate a certain percentage of the SSA budget for inclusive education.

Equally important is to monitor and report the details on what heads the expenditure is being made. Currently, the allowances for the CWSN 2023-24 was reportedly made only in the following categories⁶:

In transport category	INR 41,978
In escort category	INR 11,856
In reader category	INR 1,771
Stipends for CWSN girls	INR 14,051

Additional details not available. Without those it is not possible to monitor the adequacy of funds for the key performance indicators recognised under SSA for inclusive education (see box 3).

⁵ In 2018, the allocation for children with special needs (CWSN) was also increased from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 3,500 per child per annum including a stipend of Rs. 200 per month for CWSN girls to be provided from Classes I to XII. – earlier it was only for classes IX to XII (PIB, 2018).

⁶ Data received from Department of School Education, GoMP

Box 3: Key Performance Indicators for Inclusive Education under Samagra Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)

- Improvement in transition and retention of CWSN
- Identification and categorization of CWSN at all levels in accordance with RPDA (21 categories)
- Identification of Out of School CWSN and mainstreaming them at all levels
- Ratio of enrolled CWSN to special educators
- Percentage of children given aids and appliances
- Percentage of children received teaching learning material (TLMs)
- Percentage CWSN girls received stipend
- Percentage of schools having barrier free access (ramps with railings, CWSN friendly toilets)
- Inclusion of accessibility in school curriculum and textbooks
- Number of qualified special educators and Block Resource Persons appointed
- Number of children provided home based schooling
- Improvement in learning levels of CWSN at all levels
- Percentage of teachers trained in early identification support and classroom support of CWSN.

In terms of transition and retention, as discussed earlier in section on education status of children with disabilities (page 6) the state is doing well in the last couple years for retention at the elementary level. However, transition from upper primary to secondary at around 12.76% is still a challenge. Interestingly, the transition from secondary to higher secondary at around 82.77% is again good (figure 7).

This very clearly highlights the need to focus on enrolment in primary and secondary schools. It is clear from the key informant interviews, that this is a major challenge for most children with disabilities as schools especially private schools have not been open for admission. In fact there are cases from Bhopal wherein private schools have been demanding a full time caretaker for enrolment of a child with disability. The state needs to take clear actions to address these issues. One suggestion could

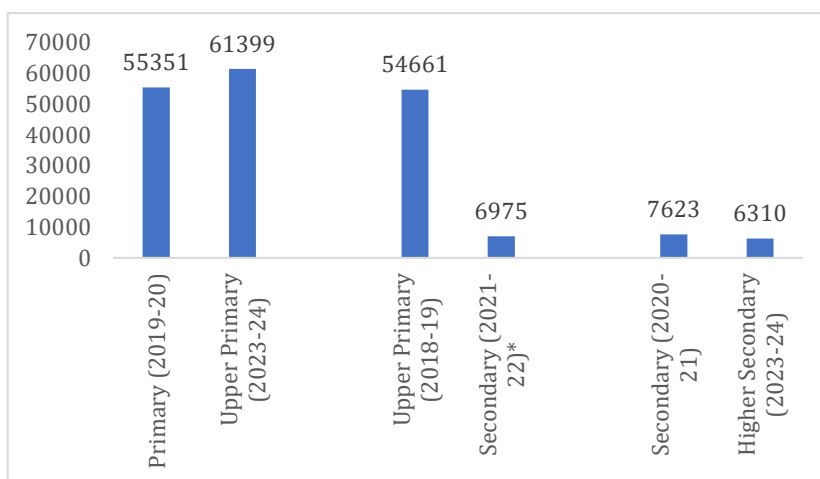


Figure 7: Transition of Children with Disabilities in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + multiple years)

* Secondary school enrolment has been reported at 66% to ensure class parity with upper primary

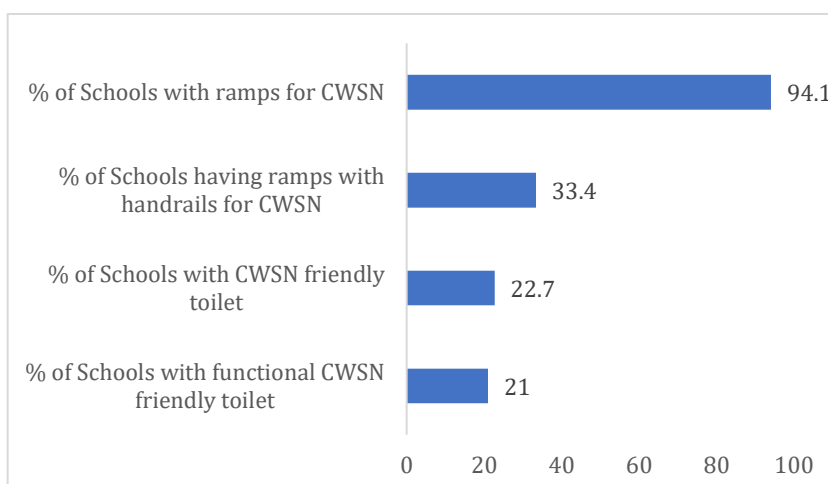


Figure 8: Accessibility of elementary school infrastructure in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + 2023-24)

be linking up with the child helpline of WCD for raising complaints on the same and taking actions against the schools.

Unfortunately, data on number of special educators, provision of teaching learning material (TLMs), stipend, home-based schooling, learning levels, etc. is not available. Key informant interviews reported that while braille textbooks are being distributed in schools, the children don't know braille and hence cannot use the same.

However, recent reports from the state (UDISE+, 2023-24) show that only 21% of elementary schools have functional disabled friendly toilets, and only 33.4% had handrails along with ramps (figure 8). What is even more critical is that government schools supported by the state government are most lagging behind especially in terms of disabled friendly toilets. UDISE+ data (2023-24) shows that only 13% of the state government schools has such toilets, as compared to 85% of NVS and KVS schools, 33% of other central government schools, 40% of government-aided schools and 44.6% of recognised private unaided schools.

Even more disturbing is the fact that only 21,633 (4%) of the total six lakh teachers have been trained to address the needs of children with disabilities (figure 9).

Many of these are concerns which would need to be addressed by the state department either directly or through advocacy with the concerned departments if children with disabilities need to be given their rightful access to education.

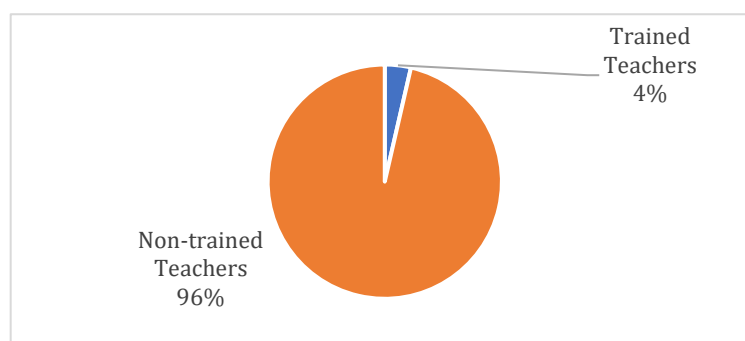


Figure 9: Proportion of elementary school teachers trained to address needs of children with disabilities in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE + 2021-22)

Equally important is to collate data related to status of accessibility of educational institutions. In the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports, for example, only ramps and separate toilets for females are surveyed, although that is not the only criteria to make the higher education institutes accessible for students with disabilities. There should also be a survey conducted on the availability of lifts, elevators, inclusive toilets, restrooms, and hostel facilities for students with disabilities in all the educational institutions, as a person with a locomotor disability may need these amenities.

Special schools for children with disabilities

There are also special schools and hostels for children with disabilities, aiming for inclusive education and empowerment. Run by government, as government-aided, or privately, these schools and hostels ensure that the children are not excluded from the general education system. As per UDISE + 2021-22, there are 346 special schools in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Around 80% (277) of these

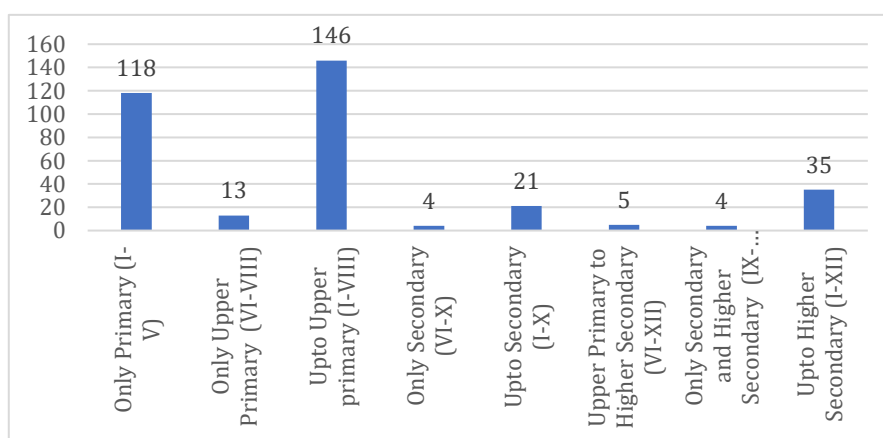


Figure 10: Number of Special Schools for different levels of education in Madhya Pradesh (UDISE +2021-22)

institutions cater to students at primary or upper primary level (figure 10). Almost half of these are run privately, unrecognised by the government, and another one-third are run by the department of education (figure 11).

It is a critical issue, that the number of special schools run by the government is very limited. However, even more concerning is the fact that while the education department is reported to be running the maximum number of special schools and residential institutions for children with disabilities, the allocations for the same, under the budget head 7734-Education and Residence facilities for children with special needs, of the department of education although increasing in the last few years, is still very limited (figure 12). Further there are challenges in utilization of the allocated budget. In fact in 2021-22, there was nil expenditure made. And although this might be probably due to the pandemic when hostels were all closed, even in 2022-23, the actual expenditure was only 61% of the revised estimates and in 2023-24 the revised estimates was only 30% of the budget estimates. It is important for the education department to increase the monitoring of the allocations under the head to ensure better management of the facilities provided by them.

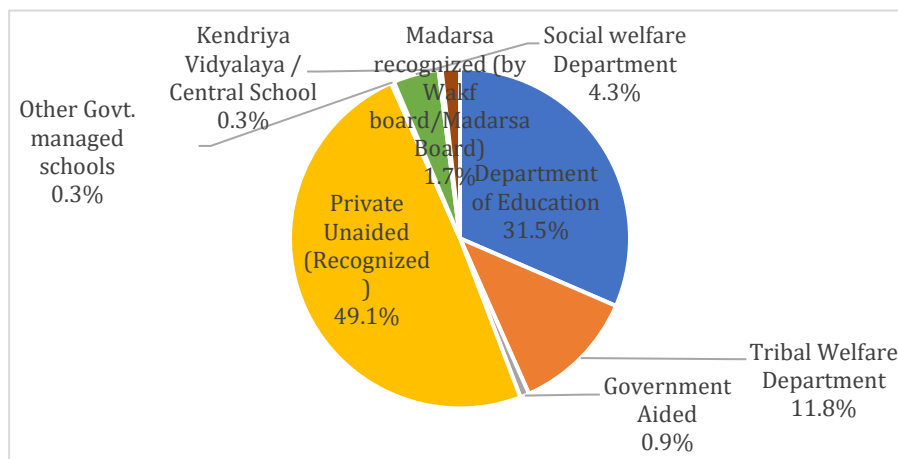


Figure 12: Special Schools in Madhya Pradesh by Type of Management (UDISE +2021-22)

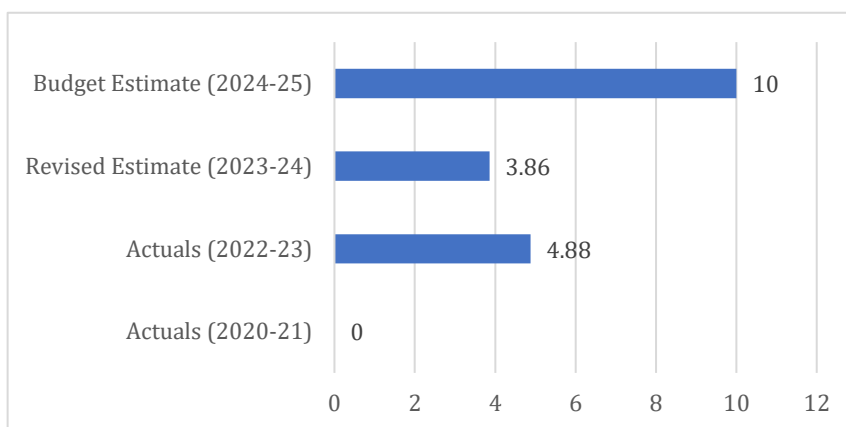


Figure 11: Budget Allocations (in crore rupees) in the last four years by Department of Education for "Education and residence facilities for CWSNs in Madhya Pradesh"

Source: Child Budget Statements, GoMP (multiple years)

Field visits to residential facilities of education department, does highlight that while scope of improvement exists, the situation on the ground is better. The hostel visited as part of the study was run by an NGO until last year, when it was taken over by the school education department. The hostel had around 50 seats of which around 30 were currently occupied. It only takes children with hearing and visual impairment with the proportion of former being much higher than the latter. The hostel had one well equipped seminar hall, kitchen, dining cum play area and dormitories for students. There were some tools and equipments available for the children in the seminar hall. There was a full-time warden and special educator for hearing impaired and a part time special educator (from Aarambh- a local NGO) for visually impaired apart from support staff. The hostel was attached to a local government school. The children are escorted in a rickshaw to the school every day and brought back. The place was reasonably clean and had information posters everywhere. It would be good to have

some contrast painted walls rather than regular schools colours for better accessibility of visually impaired children. However, neither the school nor the hostel had adequate accessibility features. There was not even tactile flooring done. In fact, the dormitory of the visually impaired had a step down just from the room.

Running special schools and hostels for children with disabilities is also an important function of the SJED. Interestingly, however, while the SJED is reported to be running only 15 institutions as per UDISE+2021-22, as per the data received by the department, there are 20 schools visually, hearing and speech impaired students run directly by the SJED in addition to 33 government-aided institutions. Further, there are 9 government-aided residential schools for hearing and speech impaired students and 24 government-aided hostels for visually, hearing and speech impaired students. The discrepancy further highlights the concerns related to data on access to education for children with disabilities in the state and the need for a dedicated study and report to be published on the same.

Again data on number of students enrolled/ residing in these institutions was available only for 18 government and 23 government aided institutions. Of these only 9 government run institutions cater to children with intellectual disabilities. The data (table 5) shows that the total number of students enrolled are only 3863 which is a very miniscule number compared to the total number of children with disabilities in the state. Data also shows that a high 60% of the children enrolled are residential, further pointing to the need for more residential facilities for children with disabilities.

Table 5: Students with disabilities in Special Schools Run/Aided by SJED in Madhya Pradesh, 2023-24

Type of School Management	Boys	Girls	Total
Government Run (Residential)	641	57	698
Government Run (Non-Residential)	425	210	635
Government Run (Total)	1066	267	1333
Government Aided (Residential)	1061	582	1643
Government Aided (Non-Residential)	595	292	887
Government Aided (Total)	1656	874	2530
Total	2722	1141	3863

Source: Department of Social Justice, GoMP

Another important aspect is that only 29.% of those enrolled are girls highlighting the need for the state to have more dedicated facilities for girls with disabilities. Interestingly the enrollement of girls was higher at 34.5% in government aided institutions compared to 20% in government run institutions. Even among girls, it was observed that the enrollement as residential students although high at 43.9% is much lesser than the overall 60%. There is thus the need to have more dedicated residential facilities for girls with disabilities.

Further, over 65% of those enrolled are in government-aided institutions, which most often do not cater to needs of children with intellectual disabilities. Given that enrollment in general education system is a much higher challenge for such children, it is important for the government to run/support more such institutions. Additionally, there are also limitations related to fund allocations (table 6). Although, the utilization rates are good at around 94% for 0073 and better at 73% for 0079.

Table 6: Budget Allocations (in crore rupees) in the last four years for special schools by SJED in Madhya Pradesh

Sub Scheme Head	Actuals (2021- 22)	Actuals (2022- 23)	Revised Estimate (2023-24)	Budget Estimate (2024-25)
0073-Grants to Schools of blind, deaf and dumb	58.7	54.1	62.0	62.0
0079- Schools and institutions for blind and deaf	12.6	14.2	17.3	20.7
<i>Source: Child Budget Statement GoMP (multiple years)</i>				

The quality of the institutions currently being run by SJED, was found to be adequate during the field visits. Although the institution visited was very old (since 1956) but the building was relatively new (completed in 2014). Basic infrastructure facilities are available, although there are some gaps. The interior was well maintained, and had accessibility features like ramps, railings and tactile flooring in place. However, considering that it's a residential school, there needs to be some more work on the outside both in terms of visual appeal and security. Currently, there is no security guard or CCTVs observed.

It was also seen that against the 100 seats available in the institution, there are 193 students (table 7). In fact in the previous year there were 239 pass outs. The highlights the demand for such institutes and the need for the GoMP to increase the number of such schools.

Table 7: Sex and Disability wise data on students in Special School run by SJED in Bhopal

Type of disability/Sex	Boys	Girls	Total
Hearing Impaired	130	40	170 (86%)
Visually Impaired	16	7	23 (14%)
Total	146 (74%)	47 (26%)	197

There seems to be a gender bias with lesser number of girls enrolled. One reason could be that there are no residential facilities provided to girls. There is a residential facility for boys with 57 boys (49 hearing and 8 visually impaired) staying currently. Discussions also revealed that there was a lack of awareness in enrolling girls both in terms of need for girl child education and availability of such a facility. Many girls are brought there at an older age (10 to 12 years), and often not by parents but employers of the parents. The children are mostly from poor and middle-income families. It was shared that those with resources prefer to go to Asha Niketan which has better facilities.

The major concern area seen was that of availability of teachers, and limited access to students for STEM and vocational education. Currently for a pre-primary (kg 1) to higher secondary (XII) school, the school has only 5 teachers for visually impaired and 3 teachers for hearing impaired. This results in multiple classes being run parallelly (around 5 classes per period). There was a very good drawing teacher but no music teacher. There is especially gap of science and math teachers. There is a computer lab but no computer teacher.

The existing teaching staff for children with special needs also lacks proper training, prompting the department to seek the deployment of certified personnel. However, there is also lack of qualified special educators. Teacher's training is undertaken at CRC but it is mainly related to curriculum updation. There are no special educator's trainings. It was also suggested that it would be good to have quarterly meetings of all teachers working in schools for children with special needs at district level.

Data on pass percentage was not shared. It was mentioned that last year the results were poor as the school campus was closed from June 2023 to Jan 2024. There are no vocational training courses

running, although the institute does support tenth pass students to apply at Industrial Training Institute (ITI) for Computer Operator and Programming Assistant, Fitter and Tailoring courses. There is potential to train on retailing, tally, Goods and Service Tax accounting, photography, etc. Career counselling is sometimes done in PPP mode (for example with Sarthak) and children have been placed at DMart and Petrol pumps. However, they often drop out due to lack of skills. Data not placement was not available (it does not seem to be consolidated) No linkage for coaching to get admissions for higher education or competitive exams is being undertaken.

National Scholarship Programme

The DoEPwD, GoI, implements six scholarship schemes for students with benchmark disabilities namely 1) Pre-matric Scholarship (for classes IX & X), 2) Post-matric Scholarship (for class XI to Post-Graduate Degree/Diploma), 3) Top Class Education Scholarship (For Graduate and Post-Graduate Degree/Diploma in notified institutes of excellence in education), 4) National Overseas Scholarship (for Master's Degree/Ph.D. in Institutions/Colleges/Universities abroad), 5) National Fellowship (for M. Phil and Ph.D. in Indian Universities and 6) Free Coaching Scheme (for recruitment examinations for Group A, B and C posts and entrance examinations for admission to various technical and professional courses). All six scholarships are open to students with benchmark disability and having a valid certificate of disability as prescribed under rules issued by the competent authority. Pre-matric and Post-matric Scholarship is provided to the students whose parents/guardians income from all sources does not exceed Rs.2,50,000/- per annum; while Top Class Education Scholarship shall be paid to the students whose parents/guardians income from all sources does not exceed Rs.8,00,000/- per annum. 50% of the total scholarships available each year is reserved for girl candidates, however, unutilized slots can be utilized by selecting suitable male candidates. All applications are managed through the National Scholarship Portal and the amount is directly credited into the bank account of the beneficiaries through direct benefit transfer (DBT) mode. The number and amount of scholarships provided for select scholarship schemes is given in table 8.

Table 8: Details of National Scholarship Schemes for Students with disabilities

Type of Scholarship	Number sanctioned nationally	Amount of Scholarships per annum (range as it might vary slightly for different types of disabilities)	
		Day Scholar	Hosteller
Pre-matric scholarships	25,000 (including renewal cases)	18000- 20000	21000-23000
Post-matric scholarships	17,000 (including renewal cases)	10000- 12000 plus non refundable fees upto Rs 1.40 lakhs and miscellenous fees up to Rs. 10,000 ⁷	15500-17500 plus non refundable fees upto Rs 1.40 lakhs and miscellenous fees up to Rs. 10,000
Top Class Education	300 (including renewal cases)	Rs. 40,000 for maintenance, disability and book allowance. Tuition fees up to Rs. 1.90 lakh and miscellenous fees up to Rs. 10,000; Rs. 35,000 in maintenance, disability and book allowance and Rs. 45,000 one time grant	Rs. 55,000 for maintenance, disability and book allowance. Tuition fees up to Rs. 1.90 lakh and miscellenous fees up to Rs. 10,000; Rs. 50,000 in maintenance, disability and book allowance. Rs. 45,000 one time grant for laptop/computer and

⁷ There is no limit for refundable fees.

		for laptop/computer and Rs. 30,000/- as a one time grant for asisstive devices	Rs. 30,000/- as a one time grant for asisstive devices
National Overseas	20 + ongoing cases	-	-
National Fellowship	200+ ongoing cases	-	-
Free Coaching	1000	-	-

Source: Scheme guidelines revised by DoEPwD from 20th September 2024⁸

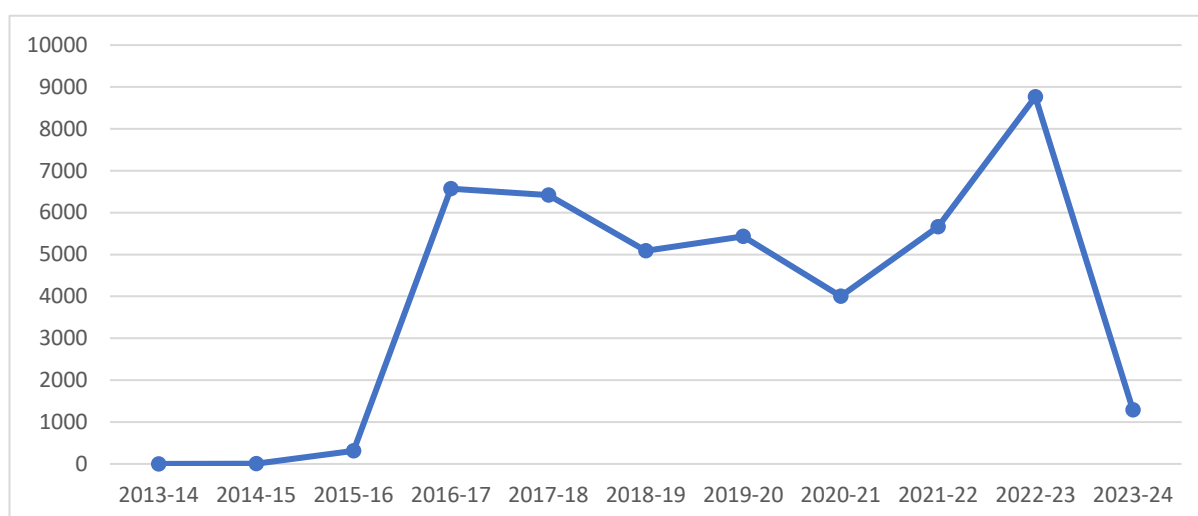


Figure 13: Number of beneficiaries of various national scholarship schemes in Madhya Pradesh in the last ten years

Source: DoEPwD Website

<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2023/10/20240627226627577.pdf>

There are fixed slots for each state, but the information on the same is not publically available. Data on actual number of beneficiaries in Madhya Pradesh in the last ten years (figure 13), however, shows that the state has not been able to realize the full potential of slots in many years. The state has made significant improvements in select years like 2015-16, 2020-21, and 2021-22; but in the rest of the years an year-on-year decline in the number of beneficaories is seen. This is a major area of concern as the average number of annual beneficiaries of 4,355 is a very low number, covering only 5.23% of the total 83,258 children aged 6 to 15 years having UDID cards.

The lower number of beneficiaries results in the amount of funds being released also being less compared to some of the other large states in India (figure 14). Equally discerning is the average amount of scholarship per student which comes to around INR 19,000 in the last five years. This further points to the fact that scholarships are probably being availed mostly at pre-matric level and not at higher levels. The state needs to make specific efforts to increase the access of children with benchmark disabilities to national scholarships, especially beyond class X.

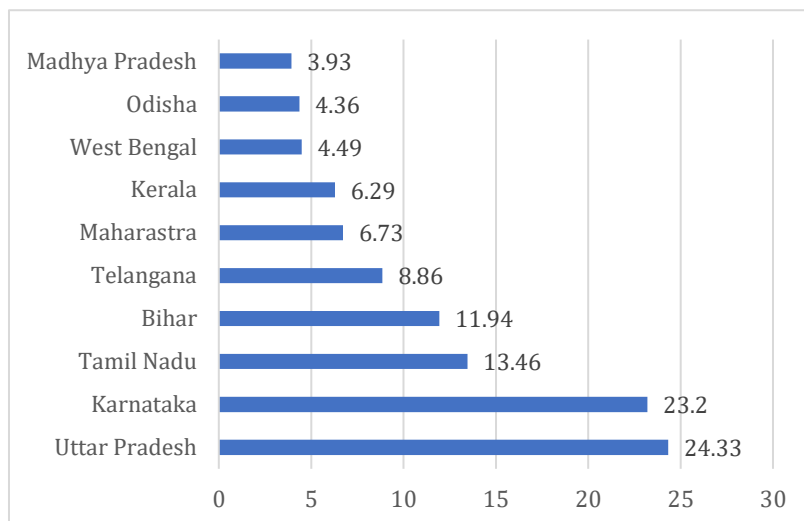


Figure 14: State-wise fund released under various National Scholarship Schemes in 2023-24

State Scholarships to visually, hearing and speech impaired

The GoMP through the SJED also provides scholarships to children with visual, hearing and speech impairments. The number of beneficiaries under that scheme are significantly higher than those of national scholarship schemes. As per the data received from SJED, the numbers have also almost tripled in the last two years (figure 15). The figures of 2023-24 also show a high 39.15% coverage among the total

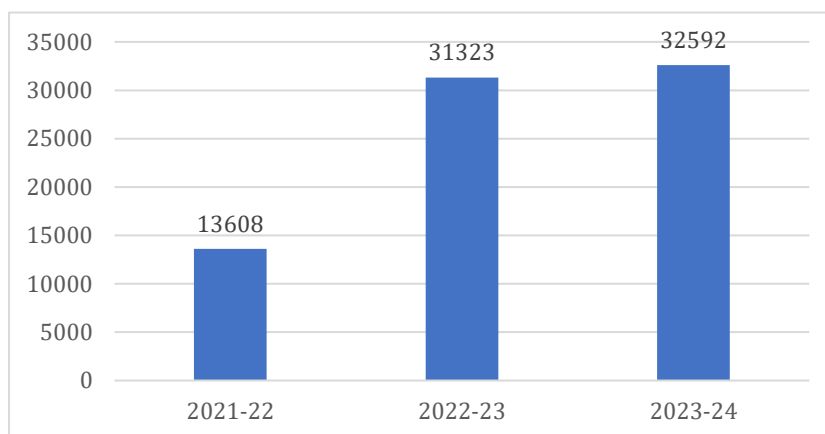


Figure 15: Beneficiaries under State Scholarship Scheme for Children with Disabilities in the last three years in Madhya Pradesh

83,258 children aged 6 to 15 years having UDID cards. However, in terms of amount of scholarships being received the average seems to be declining as the actual expenditure seems stagnant (figure 16). Another area concern is the low utilization in the scheme. Although the state had allocated around 5 crores in 2022-23 (Revised Estimates) for the scheme the actual utilization was only 2.36 crores (47.2%).

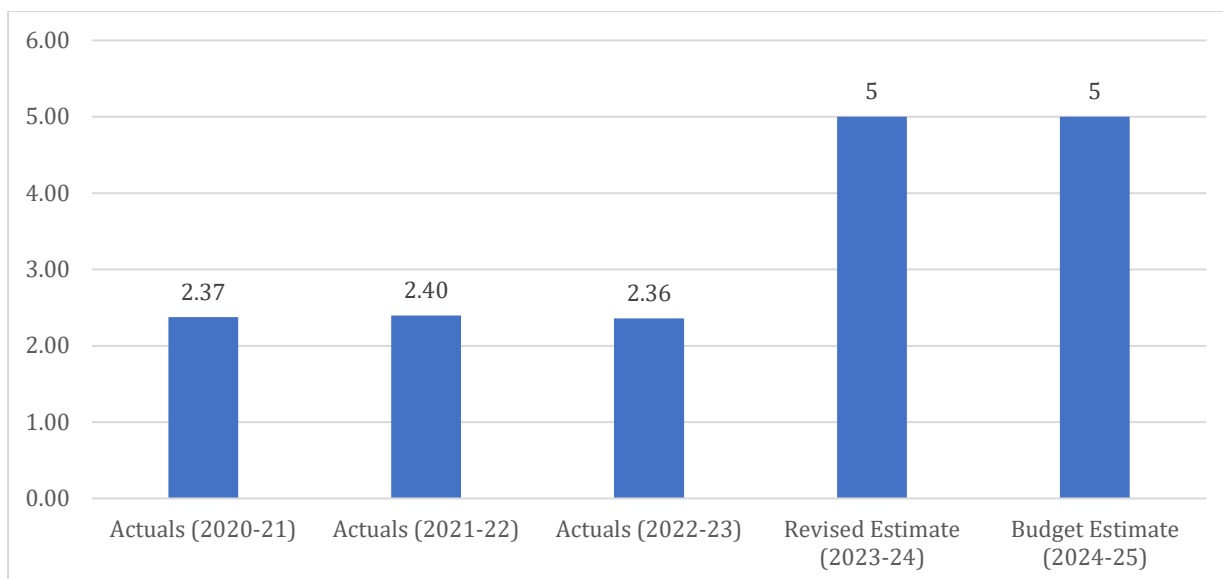


Figure 16: Budget allocations in last five years under (0075) Scholarships to blind, deaf and dumb in Madhya Pradesh

Source: Child Budget Statements (multiple years)

The state also provides support for higher education under the “Madhya Pradesh Higher Education Fees, Disability Living Allowance, Transport Allowance Scheme for Disabled Students” scheme. However, the figures in the last three years have been dismal at 13, 7 and 12 for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 respectively.

The analysis of both national and state scholarship data shows that while funds are available, there seems to be a demand gap or challenges in getting an uptake on the benefits. There clearly seems to be an awareness deficit related to the benefits being provided to students with disabilities. It is important for the state to focus on the same. One solution could be organizing annual camps for registration of students with disabilities at the national and state portals to be able to avail the scholarship benefits.

Other State Benefits

Additionally the GoMP also provides students with disabilities additional benefits like provision of laptop and motorised tricycle under the Chief Minister Diyang Siksha Protsahan Scheme. In 2023-24, around 537 students got laptops and 604 students received motorised tricycle under the scheme (as presented by SJED in seminar for children with disabilities). A total fund of INR 187.95 crores was allocated for laptop provision and INR 253.68 crore was allocated for provision of motorised tricycle (ibid).

Key issues and Recommendations

Enable access to early childhood care and education (ECCE)

- Only enrolment in anganwadi centres and provision of THR for children with disabilities is not enough. Anganwadi workers need to be trained to deal with children with special needs. Also where the number of such children enrolled in a centre is high (5 or more), there needs to be an additional dedicated helper in place, who is trained on the addressing the specific needs of children with disabilities.
- Anganwadi centres, including those in urban areas need to be audited for accessibility and retrofitting of all anganwadi centres need to be undertaken in coordination with the accessibility India campaign and SIDPA scheme.

- A kit for children with disabilities aged 24 to 59 months needs to be designed, developed and provided at the anganwadi centre. The Department of WCD and SJED can coordinate for DDRC professionals to organize camps at anganwadi centres for distribution of these kits and training on parents of children with disabilities to provide early stimulation and responsive care. Activities can include reading books or looking at picture books with the child; telling stories; singing songs to or with the child; taking the child outside the home; playing with the child; naming, counting or drawing things for or with the child. The kit can include playthings such as toys, reading and picture books, stories for parents, etc.
- The number of dedicated ECCE centres supported under DDRC in the state needs to be increased. There should be atleast two centres per district with higher numbers in larger districts.

Enrolment in primary schools needs to be increased

- It is important to ensure enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. An advisory/government order (GO) can be issued in this regard from the District Education Officer to all private and government schools stating disciplinary action against schools which refuse admissions to children with disabilities.
- A helpline number (dedicated or in coordination with existing childline number) needs to be initiated to take complaints and support enrolment of children in schools.
- Special enrolment drives can be undertaken in urban and rural areas in coordination with the local bodies for children with disabilities in primary schools. This can also be promoted as a low cost activity within the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP).
- Increase the number of special schools for children with disabilities, in line with the demand for the same.
- Support for education is often provided by governments, but it can also come from private, charitable, local or international organizations. Seminars may be organized for CSR funding to be provided to schools on enrolment of children with disabilities to compensate for the additional resources required for his or her education. Such transfers can also be provided directly to private schools to encourage them to enrol children with disabilities.

Transition from primary to secondary school needs to be ensured

- A critical gap area observed is the low transition from primary to secondary schooling. To enable this a tracking mechanisms can be developed through the Samagra platform to monitor the status of children with disabilities who pass class VIII and are enrolled in class IX.
- An awareness campaign cum scholarship registration camp can be organized in the beginning of each academic session to ensure enrolment of all such children in secondary schools and under the pre-matric scholarship program of the national or state government.
- Increased monitoring of the enrolment and renewal of students availing national and state scholarships needs to be undertaken. The SJED should set a target of achieving 100% coverage of the allocated slots for national scholarships to the state for the next five years.

Accessible infrastructure in schools

- Develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) to benchmark schools with disability friendly indicators.
- Conduct a state-wide accessibility audit of all government and government-aided primary and secondary schools.
- Based on the retrofitting needs emerging from the above, increase allocations under SSA for making schools more accessible. Education department should target 100% coverage of all government and government aided schools to have ramps with handrails and disabled friendly toilets in the next three years. The disabled friendly toilets in secondary schools also need to include provisions menstrual hygiene management. Funds needs to be allocated for the same as part of SSA and implementation of the same to be actively monitored.
- Increase access to ICT by creation of computer labs with accessible systems in all schools. In addition to laptops, tablets can also be considered to be provided to children with disabilities.

Box 1: Setting standards for special residential schools

A model school can be created to demonstrate the standards for special residential schools. The Government Deaf and Blind Residential School at Bhopal can be upgraded with the following features to create the model.

- Security guard with cabin and proper gate to be in place at the school. CCTVs cameras around the campus with monitoring room to be established.
- External and internal wall paintings to increase the visual appeal of the centre. The internal wall paintings can be done either by the students themselves or through collaboration with any other private school for their students.
- Establish a playground for children with accessible equipments with CSR support.
- Create a vocational training room within the campus for provision of basic skill development trainings for children from class VI to XII. The equipments can be established and the programmes can be run in partnership with existing skill training institutes (running different courses in different months)
- Coaching classes for admission in higher education (other than regular BA) to be run at the centre.
- Establish a dedicated career counselling and personality development course in collaboration with local schools or CSR.
- Encourage students to participate in art exhibitions.
- School bus provision for pick up and drop of students.

Improved learning outcomes is also important

- Focus on big size model schools like CM Rise and PM Shri schools to include and track the progress on children with disabilities. These schools should have adequately trained teachers, equipment, infrastructure etc. as one of their priorities.
- Coordinate with the National Achievement Survey (NAS) to publish data on learning outcomes for children with special needs separately as part of the state report cards.
- There is an urgent need for training of all teachers linked with education department on awareness related to disability issues and potential of children. Annual trainings and refresher courses from one to six days need to be organized. There should be a training calendar plan in summer vacations for 10 days for visually impaired and 6 days for hearing impaired, initially with not more than 25 teachers per training, followed by refresher trainings every 2 to 3 years. The trainings can also be conducted at district level.
- The teachers trained should not be those nearing retirement (below 45 years). Preference should be given to teachers from CWSN schools of schools with enrolled CWSN. Teachers from across subjects should be identified and trained.
- STEM teachers need to be trained to teach students especially those with visual impairment (a batch of 50 teachers can be developed in each district).
- Quality of teachers with teaching aids need enhancement. For this training to teachers and suggestions for B. Ed with special ability course in disabled schools run by govt and social justice dept.
- Explore the potential of special B.Ed. admission free coaching programme to be organized for residential school students in XI and XII standards to enable them to get admission in B.Ed and train as teachers and special educators. This would solve both problems of availability of trained teachers as well as provide the students with job opportunities. As per the RPDA, 4% reservation is mandatory for persons with disabilities across the board. This would also be applicable in 274 colleges specialising in Education/Teacher Education in the state. It would be interesting to calculate the number of seats in these colleges generated annually wherein students with disabilities can be enrolled. Based on the number and location, in select districts, a coaching

programme for admission in B.Ed courses can be run within residential school students in XI and XII standards.

Special Educator Programme for Teachers

- A special educator programme for teachers can be piloted in one district based on the following points.
 - Identify 25 teachers for atleast 7 subject (english, hindi, maths, social science, science, physics, chemistry, biology, commerce, accounting, etc.) in the district for the training (below 45 years of age)
 - Conduct dedicated training programmes (6 days for hearing impaired and 10 days for visually impaired) in the district
 - Identify 50 teachers (from the above group) in the district and facilitate a 45 days special educator programme for them
 - Conduct an impact assessment of the programme after 2 years to identify measures for scaling up.
 - Conduct monthly sign language training courses for teachers in partnership with District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) and Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLRTC), New Delhi
 - Conduct half yearly braille training courses in partnership with DIET and National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), Dehradun

Focus on girls with disabilities

- There is a specific need to focus on enrolment of girls with disabilities in primary and secondary education. While the national scholarships provide 50% reservation for girls, the state could provide an incentive for girls with disabilities. This incentive can be provided to the parents or directly to the schools to encourage them to enrol girls with disabilities.
- Allocate dedicated funds for setting up hostel facilities for girls with disabilities, or ensuring that the existing girls hostels in each block has a dedicated wing for girls with disabilities retrofitted to suit their needs and made accessible.
- Programmes to educate parents about the right to education can encourage them to advocate on behalf of their children. At the community level, stigma and discrimination need to be addressed and awareness of the multiple benefits of inclusive education increased.

Volunteer programme for “Persons with Disabilities”

- Approach old age-homes, Science Colleges, Private Schools, for volunteers to teach STEM courses in CWSN schools.
 - A limited period (6 to 10 days) special educator programme can be curated and conducted for Masters students in science colleges and/or retired professors (educators) and they can be recognised by the Department to be enrolled as guest faculty in residential schools or government schools to teach CWSN.
- Approach CSR foundations for corporate volunteers for personality grooming, English speaking and career mentoring in CWSN schools.
 - An orientation programme for the a select group of volunteers can be conducted with support from Arushi.
 - They can then be enrolled at different residential schools and child care institutions for CWSNs.
 - This will not only provide support to children but also create a very high level of sensitization and understanding in the corporate world on inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Address data gaps

- Dismantling barriers to education for children with disabilities also requires the strengthening of data collection systems. Data need to be regularly collected to: (1) education status of children

with disabilities in and out of school; (2) document the experiences of children with disabilities in the education system; and (3) identify the educational structures and resources required to deliver a school environment that is adequate and inclusive of all children.

- Need to collect and publish data on children with disabilities for the following indicators:
 - Out-of-school rate: Percentage of children of:
 - Primary-school age who are not attending early childhood education, primary school or higher
 - Lower-secondary-school age who are not attending primary school, lower- or upper-secondary school or higher
 - Upper-secondary-school age who are not attending primary school, lower- or upper-secondary school or higher.
 - Adjusted net attendance rate: Percentage of:
 - Children of pre-primary-school age currently attending pre-primary or primary school
 - Children of primary-school age currently attending primary or secondary school
 - Children of lower-secondary-school age currently attending lower-secondary school or higher
 - Children of upper-secondary-school age currently attending upper-secondary school or higher.
 - Children who never attended school:
 - Percentage of children aged 10 to 17 years who have never attended school.
 - Overage for grade:
 - Percentage of students attending each grade who are two or more years older than the official age for that grade.
 - Repetition rate in primary education:
 - Percentage of students who attended any given grade in primary school in the previous year and are attending the same grade in the current year.
 - Dropout rate in primary education:
 - Percentage of students who in the previous school year were enrolled in any grade in primary education (excluding the last grade), and who are no longer attending primary school in the current year.
 - Learning outcomes:
 - Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational reading skills by successfully completing three foundational reading tasks.
 - Percentage of children aged 7 to 14 years who demonstrate foundational numeracy skills by successfully completing four foundational numeracy tasks.
 - Use of Internet, computers and communication technologies

Ensure all required institutional mechanisms are in place

- An inter departmental committee for providing inputs to improve status of children with disabilities in the state can be formed with SJED, Health, WCD and Education departments on board.
- The SJED needs to set up a separate division for implementation and monitoring of coverage of children with disabilities under its various schemes. The division should also facilitate and review the status of implementation of central sector schemes such as DDRS, DDRC, etc.
- Create a state-level portal integrated with Samagra platform for all data related to coverage of children with disabilities under various government schemes.

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