

Inclusivity in School Education and the Budget

Case of Children with Disabilities

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As a signatory to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, India is committed to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable children. However, children with disabilities continue to be excluded from India's education system. This article tries to examine how states are budgeting for education of CWDs by analysing existing interventions both by union and state governments, through a detailed analysis of school education budgets for six states.

Any discussion on inclusive education must include children with disabilities (CWDs). However, CWDs continue to be the most neglected group in the education system. India is home to 4.9 million CWDs in the age group of 6–17. Only 67% of them attend any educational institutions and the remaining 33% have either dropped out or never attended any educational institutions; whereas the all-India average of school attendance rate for this age group is 80% (Census of India 2011). Existing literature shows that CWDs are more likely to be out of school than children from Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories (World Bank 2007; MHRD 2014). Moreover, when these children do attend schools they rarely progress beyond the primary level (World Bank 2007). Thus, only 0.2% of the total enrolment in higher education is represented by CWDs (MHRD 2018). This clearly indicates that our education system remains unsuccessful in providing equal access to education to all children of this country.

Existing Policies

Over the years, the government's commitment to education for CWDs has been articulated through several laws and policies. The Kothari Commission, the first education commission in 1964, drew attention to the education of CWDs and recommended the development of integrated programmes enabling the disabled children to study in regular schools. The integration with mainstream education was first realised in 1974 with the implementation of the scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) by the Department of Social Welfare. The legislative support, however, came with

the enactment of Persons with Disabilities Act as late as in 1995. The act states that

the appropriate Government and the Local authority should ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment and should endeavour to provide integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools. (Section 3[2])

In the 2005 Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities, emphasis was on specific actions to make education a successful learning experience for this group. The introduction of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act in 2009 made elementary education free to all 6–14 age group children. This enactment enforces all the schools to implement the policy of inclusive education of children with special needs (CWSN) throughout the nation (MHRD 2017a). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 reaffirms that

Notwithstanding anything contained in the Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, every child with benchmark disability¹ between the age of 6 to 18 years shall have the right to free education in a neighbourhood school, or in a special school, of his choice. (Section 31[1])

However, the act does not mention what norms and standards a special school needs to follow. Though the act has specified the provision for “barrier-free access” to school, but does not include norms, such as disabled-friendly toilets, accessible entrances, signages and accessible drinking water facilities, etc, in school. Thus, there is a need for further reform of the RTE Act to better align it with the RPWD Act by including these specific concerns of education of CWDs (UNESCO 2019). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is built on the principle of “leaving no one behind,” also calls for an inclusive approach to achieving quality education and lifelong learning for all (SDG-4) and thus provides a much-needed goal in this respect.

The series of policy measures discussed, gives an impression that CWDs have received intensive attention in the education

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policies of India. The outcomes, however, tell a different story. Despite increase in enrolment number, currently 17 lakh children in the age group of 6–13 with some form of disabilities are out of school (MHRD 2014). The percentages are higher among children with intellectual disabilities (36%), speech impairments (35%) and multiple disabilities (44%) (MHRD 2014). Using census data from 19 countries, a study by the World Bank shows that, on the one hand, access to primary education by cwws has improved over time. At the same time, the gap in primary completion rates between children with and without disabilities has increased worldwide (Male and Wodon 2017; Bakhshi et al 2017).

The policies for cwws not translating into the intended outcome could be because of the loopholes in the designing, planning, budgeting or implementation of the existing programmes and schemes, which both union and state governments have launched from time to time to realise the policy objectives.

The welfare of cwws falls primarily on the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE). In 2014–15, the union government changed the name of the Department of Disability Affairs to the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

Though disability is a state subject as per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, of the 36 states and union territories, only six states in India—Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh—have dedicated departments and district social welfare officers to work on the issues of pwds. In the rest of the states, the interventions for cwws come from the Department of Social Welfare/Social Justice (the name of the departments varies across states). Major responsibilities of this department include provision of scholarships, opening of special schools, grants in aid to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the running of special schools, vocational training, etc.

Other than the MSJE, the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) is also responsible for providing school education to cwsn. The concept

of cwsn is much broader than cwws. It may also include street children, child labour, victims of natural catastrophes and social conflicts, and those in extreme social and economic deprivation (NCERT 2006). However, the terminologies cww and cwsn are used interchangeably in the schemes under MHRD. The interventions by the department of education in states are mostly in the form of providing monetary and non-monetary incentives to cwsn through two centrally sponsored schemes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA).

The SSA categorically brings the concerns of cwws under the framework of “inclusive education.” Under it, the focus is on providing inclusive education to cwsn in neighbourhood schools, where children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same class. It provides ₹3,000 per child per annum for interventions related to education of cwsn, with ₹1,000 exclusively earmarked for engagement of resource teachers. The major interventions under the SSA are provision of free aids and appliances, transport, escort support, appointment of resource teachers, and barrier-free access, etc. After the amendment of the RTE Act in 2012, cwsn have been included in the 25% admission quota for disadvantaged children in private schools, in consonance with Section 12(1) (c) of the RTE Act.

Under the RMSA, a programme called Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) has been implemented to provide an opportunity to students with disabilities, to complete four years of secondary schooling in neighbouring schools in an inclusive and enabled environment. At the secondary level, matters relating to admission of the cwsn in schools are under the state government. Like the SSA, the IEDSS programme also earmarks ₹3,000 per child per annum as central assistance. This is topped by the states with a scholarship of ₹600 per disabled child per annum, which includes a monthly stipend of ₹200 per person to the girl students with disability (PIB 2017). Since 2018–19, with the implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA), the interventions

for cwws under SSA and RMSA have been converged under the programme.

Systemic Issues

Despite the presence of these programmes and schemes, outreach remains inadequate, and the educational needs of many cwws are not met. The causal link between disability and access to school is not a simple linear relationship but multidimensional. Literature as well as statistics indicate that human resources, infrastructural resources and financial resources are the three critical factors hindering the compliance of schools on the norms for cwws (Kalyapur 2008; Limaye 2016).

Though the District Information System for Education (DISE) provides information on availability of disabled-friendly infrastructure at the school level like availability of ramp and provision for disabled-friendly toilets, however, there is a dearth of literature that focuses on the policies for cwws from a budgetary lens. This lack of evidence leaves important questions on how and where to this is fine, unanswered (Singal 2016).

Therefore, it is important to analyse resource allocation patterns for education of cwws. The two broad research questions the paper looked at are: (i) Are union or state governments allocating or spending enough money to support the interventions like infrastructure or human resources for education of these children? (ii) How efficient is the fund utilisation by the states?

Based on six states, namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, an effort has been made to see how they are financing school education for cwws. The mix of states is intended to represent the four main regions of India, and cover both better- and poor-performing states in the education sector.

Identification of Beneficiaries

On the basis of the number of beneficiaries identified, budgetary provisions and allocations are made under different programmes/schemes. The first roadblock for any intervention to these children emerges from the absence of standard definition of disability and, hence, their

coverage. The largest population survey, Census 2001 had covered only five types of disabilities (seeing, speech, hearing, moving, and mental disability), while Census 2011 had included information pertaining to eight types of disabilities (mental retardation, mental illness, any other and multiple disability along with first four from Census 2001) (MOSPI 2017).² The SSA survey does not include children who are outside the mainstream education system. U-DISE (Unified District Information System for Education) is the only data system that covers all the 21 categories of disabilities specified under the RPWD Act, 2016.

Due to these varying definitions and data collection methodologies, data across sources are not comparable. The number of CWDS in the age group of 6–13 years varies from 34 lakh in Census 2011 to 29 lakh in MHRD (2014) to 21 lakh in DISE survey (2016–17). The discrepancy is more

prominent across states. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, the number varies from 5.9 lakh in Census 2011 to 7.2 lakh by MHRD to 2.1 lakh in the household survey carried out under SSA (Table 1). Therefore, the absence of comprehensive data is not only affecting planning and budgeting of the educational schemes for the CWDS, but also preventing many of them from claiming their right to education.

Budgetary Interventions

How a state plans and allocates its resources for school education depends on a number of indicators. Good policy measures strike a judicious balance between different types of input, output and outcome indicators to establish the link between means and ends (Kundu et al 2016).

A mapping of six study states on available educational indicators for CWDS clearly portrays the vulnerability of CWDS in accessing school education (Table 2). Even after nine years of implementation of the RTE Act that mandates universal enrolment and disabled-friendly infrastructure norms in every school, the figures for enrolment and out-of-school children demonstrate poor implementation of the act in reality.

Along with many other reasons, the reasons for policy pronouncements for CWDS not translating into expected outcomes could either be because of major gaps in the budgeting stage for the policy concerned and/or major gaps in the implementation of the schemes.

The detailed demand for grants (DDGs), the most disaggregated component of the budget book of MHRD and MSJE of the six study states, have been analysed for three years: 2015–16 (A), 2016–17 (revised estimates [RE]) and 2017–18 (budget estimates [BE]). In order to capture the budgetary information on interventions for CWDS under SSA and RMSA in a state (that is, the union and state government shares combined), data has been collected from the SSA portal and the RMSA portal. A detailed analysis of minutes of Project Approval Board (PAB) meetings of SSA and RMSA for 2016–17 and 2017–18 across six states has been carried out to gauge the budgetary outlays approved for different interventions of education specific to CWDS. Though, from 2018–19 onwards, the interventions for CWDS by MHRD are going through SMSA, but as the scheme is in its initial phase with very little information in the public domain, the analysis is restricted till 2017–18.

Interventions by MHRD

To understand the quality of budgetary interventions for CWDS under SSA, the analysis (Table 3) has looked specifically at two financial indicators, namely approved outlay for total SSA and interventions specific to CWDS under SSA by the PAB across states and expenditure for CWDS under the scheme by centre and respective states. Approved outlay reveals the amount of money approved by PAB to run a programme based on the annual workplan submitted by states, whereas “expenditure” is the audited expenditure incurred to run the programme.

The Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B) of these states show that as per the scheme guidelines, all the study states have identified a set of interventions for promoting education of CWDS. Interventions like salary of existing resource teacher, residential and non-residential training of CWDS, training of resource persons, assistive aids and appliances

Table 1: Statewise Estimates of CWDS of 6–13 Age Group by Different Institutions

States	Census 2011	MHRD 2014	DISE 2016–17	SSA 2017–18
Bihar	4,81,106	3,01,087	1,77,060	1,72,411
Chhattisgarh	76,670	57,433	62,630	44,892
Maharashtra	4,04,735	2,93,445	2,82,685	2,26,753
Tamil Nadu	1,39,584	1,18,057	1,37,134	1,36,134
Uttar Pradesh	5,92,641	7,29,117	2,40,116	2,14,385
West Bengal	2,69,950	1,61,481	1,03,005	1,03,917
All India	34,55,910	28,97,096	20,95,969	–

Source: Census of India (2011); MHRD (2014, 2017b); NUEPA (2017a).

Table 2: Select Indicators Related to School Education of CWDS

States	% Schools with Ramp	% Schools with CWSN Friendly Toilets	% of CWSN Enrolment to Total Enrolment	% CWSN Out of School to Total Out of School Children
Bihar	65.1	12.1	0.71	22.5
Chhattisgarh	66.2	50.0	1.15	46.1
Maharashtra	85.2	41.5	1.51	11.9
Tamil Nadu	66.9	21.2	1.17	27.0
Uttar Pradesh	71.5	15.1	0.54	30.5
West Bengal	58.3	11.4	0.77	21.3
India	61.3	22.4	0.94	28.1

Source: NUEPA (2017a); MHRD (2014).

Table 3: Expenditure for CWSN under SSA

States	2016–17				2017–18			
	Approved Outlay for CWSN (₹ crore)	Expenditure for CWSN (₹ crore)	Approved Outlay for CWSN as % of Total SSA Approval	Expenditure for CWSN as % of Approved Outlay for CWSN	Approved Outlay for CWSN (₹ crore)	Approved Outlay for CWSN as % of Total SSA Approval	Expenditure for CWSN (₹ crore)	Expenditure for CWSN as % of Approved Outlay for CWSN
Bihar	54	20.5	0.6	38.1	52	0.49	24.3	46.8
Chhattisgarh	16	2.7	0.7	16.7	13	0.59	1.1	8.1
Maharashtra	76	57.4	3.3	75.1	68	2.78	59.3	87.2
Tamil Nadu	41	35	1.5	85.6	41	1.47	35.6	86.8
Uttar Pradesh	50	44.7	0.3	89	64	0.31	–	–
West Bengal	45	32	1.0	70.9	31.2	0.6	25.3	81.0

The audited expenditure for SSA in Uttar Pradesh for 2017–18 not available.

Source: MHRD (2016, 2017b).

and stipends are the most common line items the states budgeted for.

An examination of the approved outlay for interventions specific to cwws in comparison to the total approved outlay for SSA shows a variation in share from 0.3% in Uttar Pradesh to 3.3% in Maharashtra in 2016–17 (Table 3). The gap between approved outlay and the actual expenditure confirms under-utilisation of resources for education of cwsn children.

For example, in Bihar, for a population of 1.7 lakh cwws, an outlay of ₹54 crore was approved in 2016–17, which is 0.6% of the total SSA outlay. Of this approved outlay for cwsn, only 21% has been utilised. The expenditure is the least for Chhattisgarh as the state spent only ₹2.7 crore for 53,057 identified cwsn, that is, ₹508 per child per annum. Interestingly, despite increase in approved outlays for SSA in 2017–18, the share of outlays for cwsn in the total SSA outlay has decreased for all six states (Table 3).

This inefficient use of resources gets reflected in outcomes. As per a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), between 2010 and 2016, against 19.16 lakh identified cwsn in AWP&B, only 18.76 lakh children were enrolled in schools. Further, against the 18.76 lakh children enrolled as cwsn, only 2.09 lakh children had a disability certificate. In Tamil Nadu, around 20,588 cwsns, identified during 2016, were not provided transportation, as funds were not allotted for this component by SSA, though funds were allotted under the Inclusive Education for Disabled (IED) (CAG 2017).

The picture is more disturbing at the secondary level. Under RMSA, the approved outlay for IEDSS varies from ₹1.4 crore in Chhattisgarh to ₹11.9 crore in Uttar Pradesh (Table 4). Though the data

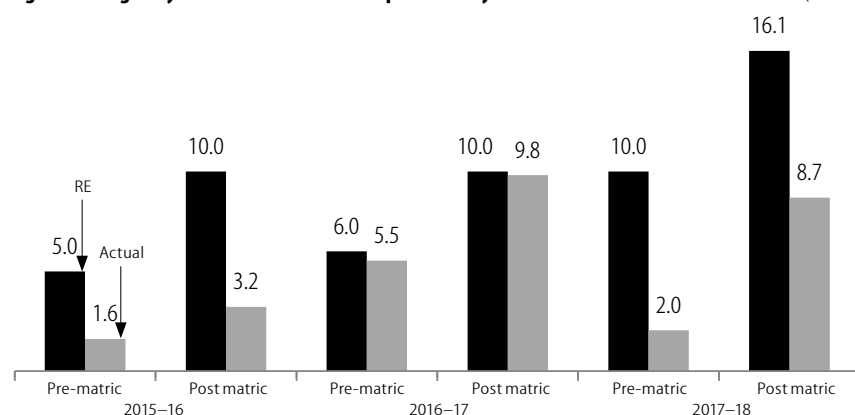
Table 4: Expenditure for CWSN under RMSA, 2017–18

States	Total RMSA Approval (₹ crore)	IEDSS Approval (₹ crore)	IEDSS as % of Total RMSA Approval
Bihar	864	3.8	0.4
Chhattisgarh	389	1.4	0.4
Maharashtra	294	73.0	24.8
Tamil Nadu	449	11.8	2.6
Uttar Pradesh	316	11.9	3.8
West Bengal	242	6.8	2.8

Source: MHRD (2017c).

Figure 1: Budgetary Allocation for Scholarship of CWDs by Government of India

(₹ crore)



Source: Union Budget Document, various years.

for funds released and actual expenditure under IEDSS are not available in the public domain, but the amount of approved fund clearly indicates how low could have been the allocation and actual expenditure under this component.

Shortage of Special Educators

Recruitment and capacity building of special teachers for cwsn is an important intervention suggested under both SSA and RMSA. Teaching children with special needs in regular classroom is a process. However, teachers' training with a focus on "special children" is still in a nascent phase in India. There are currently no pre-service training offered to regular teachers that prepare them for inclusive classroom teaching (NCERT 2006; Singal 2016). A study by Bharti (2016) has shown that out of the 20, in 19, BED (General) programmes, inclusive education was not mentioned in the aims and objectives of the programme being offered. Moreover, the module for in-service teacher training is unidimensional, short on techniques to teach children with physical and learning disabilities, and does not consider the cultural and socio-economic diversity of the country.

Despite these major issues, no additional efforts were recorded from any of the states. Both SSA and RMSA advocate for empowering the regular teachers in taking care of special educational needs. However, it never indicates that special educators are not needed. The PAB for RMSA observed that each study state is suffering from acute shortage of special educators. The AWP&Bs of RMSA for the

last few years show that not a single study state has budgeted for special educators. In 2015, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) made it compulsory for its affiliated schools to appoint a special educator (Choudhari 2015). However, in 2015–16, the Maharashtra government terminated appointments of all special educators. Later, following a court order, they restored the services of IEDSS teachers, but salaries were approved only for 70% of teachers. In West Bengal, under the IEDSS component, positions for 483 special educators were approved in 2016–17. However, till date, no special educators have been recruited by the state (MHRD 2017c).

Interventions

Along with MHRD, at the union level, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities under MSJE provides financial assistance for the education of cwws under the Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS). The scheme provides grants-in-aid to NGOs for running special schools and vocational training centres. The department assisted 371 special schools during 2016–17. However, the number of supported organisation is not commensurate with the number of cwws, especially in the states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar. Hence, there are chances of large number of cwws being left out of the benefits of the scheme.

Pre-matric and post-matric scholarship for the students with disabilities is another major intervention of the department. It is a central-sector scheme, which implies 100% financing by the centre.

However, in the last three years the allocated fund by the Government of India (GoI), especially for pre-matric scholarship has not been utilised fully (Figure 1, p 37). However, the states reported that delayed release of grants by GoI, introduction of e-portal for scholarships in 2015–16 has resulted in underutilisation of the allocated fund (Lok Sabha Secretariat 2018). Thus, there was undue delay in the transfer of scholarship amount to the beneficiary's bank account, which has huge implication on the education of these students.

Table 5 shows the allocation and expenditure of states in the last three years in the context of all educational interventions for CWDs by the nodal department. In 2015–16 (A), while the six states together spent ₹192 crore, this has increased to ₹260 crore in 2017–18 (BE). The six states together constitute 54% of the CWDs in the 6–17 age group and 2% of total number of children aged 6–17 years (Census of India 2011). However, the allocation for CWDs in any of the study states is not even 1% of the total school education budget.

Table 5: Budgetary Interventions for School Education Specific to CWDs

States	₹ crore)*		
	2015–16 (A)	2016–17 (RE)	2017–18 (BE)
Bihar	3.0	3.9	4.2
Chhattisgarh	10.4	11.7	17.9
Maharashtra	35.1	40.2	46.5
Tamil Nadu	53.0	68.6	66.3
Uttar Pradesh	52.0	58.5	72.4
West Bengal	38.1	43.5	52.3

*Total does not include expenditure on CWDs through SSA and RMSA as the disaggregated data of allocation for SSA and RMSA and expenditure for RMSA not available in the public domain.

Source: Detailed Demand for Grants, State Budget 2016–17 and 2017–18.

A low approved outlay resulting in lower allocation and even lower expenditure for education of CWDs across states means that barrier-free school education for CWDs is not a priority for any state government. This visible resource gap in different interventions for CWDs is because of gaps in planning to budgeting to implementation stages. An absence of realistic estimates of the numbers of children coping with various types of disabilities is one of the crucial factors for under-allocation.

NITI Aayog in its Action Agenda recommended awarding at least 4.8 lakh

scholarships and fellowships to students with disabilities over the three-year period (2017–18 to 2019–20) of the action plan (NITI Aayog 2017). The report suggested giving out one-third of the scholarships by 2017–18, with a cost of approximately ₹4,729 per student. However, the expenditure by states speaks volumes about the importance attached by state governments to issues faced by CWDs. To increase the unit cost in the line of NITI Aayog's recommendation, the states need to increase their investments substantially for CWDs.

Innovative Initiatives by States

In the last 10 years, many of the states have taken innovative initiatives towards mainstreaming of education of CWDs. For example, among the study states, the Maharashtra government has selected one school in urban/semi-urban blocks and converted them into multipurpose resource and training centre where CWDs from surrounding schools in the block can come to avail of a broad spectrum of services (SE Shagun web portal). From 2004, under SSA, the Uttar Pradesh government is carrying out co-educational, residential bridge course for children with hearing impairment and children who are visually impaired. The government has modified the form of these integration camps as “accelerated learning camps” since 2014–15. However, given the need, these initiatives are minuscule.

Conclusions

An inclusive approach towards education is a prerequisite for holistic development of India. It is true that at the policy level, the importance of inclusive education was never contested. However, when programmes were designed, the entire population of CWDs was considered as a homogeneous group. As a result, the policy pronouncements in the sector have been unable to optimally translate government efforts into effective outcomes on the ground.

The actual identification of CWDs is one of the key elements in the design and budgeting of programmes. The analysis highlights a stark difference in the identified number of CWDs between school records and household-level survey data.

As a result, there is visible resource gap in each stage of policymaking starting from planning to budget to implementation.

Thus, the first priority of the government should be proper identification of these children. In this process, it is crucial to use a standard definition of disability by different ministries/programmes. There is a need for convergence in activities between MHRD and MSJE. It could have been ideal if all interventions for education of CWDs be shifted to MHRD.

A disability certificate is a basic document required to avail benefits of various interventions for education meant for CWDs and this is also the first stage where exclusion happens. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment found that out of 2.68 crore, only 57% person with disabilities (PWDs) had disability certificates till August 2017 (Lok Sabha Secretariat 2018). There is a need to simplify the process of acquiring the disability certificate to expand the coverage of beneficiaries.

The current analysis of six states finds that policy interventions have not been reciprocated by adequate allocations. There is a need to invest adequately in building disabled-friendly infrastructure and recruiting special educators in every school. Alternatively, special education knowledge must be imparted to all teachers in pre-service and in-service training. Financing should be made based on the physical disabilities of children, along with their learning disabilities. States should allocate funds based on the number of children and the categories they fall under.

These are some basic issues that have not been addressed for long because addressing them means acknowledgement of the issues, proper identification, and prioritisation in terms of financial allocations. Thus, clearly, if India wants to

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achieve the goal of inclusive education by 2030, there is need for a holistic approach towards mainstreaming CWDs along with the deployment of adequate financial resources and its efficient utilisation.

NOTES

- 1 According to Section 2(r) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, a “person with benchmark disability” means a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability, as certified by the certifying authority.
- 2 The definition of different types of disabilities used in Census 2011 has been discussed in detail in the report “Disabled Persons in India: A Statistical Profile 2016” by MOSPI 2017, pp 14–15.

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