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Enrolment Declines at School Education Level: A Data-Based Analysis (UDISE+ 2021-2025)

Introduction

The Indian school education system, encompassing 1.47 million schools, over 10.1 million teachers, and nearly 24.7 crore students in 2024–25, has witnessed significant transformations during the last four years. Between 2021–22 and 2024–25, total enrolment in classes 1-12 declined from 25.57 crore to 24.69 crore, a contraction of 0.88 crore students (–3.4%), as indicated by successive rounds of the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+).

These declines should not be misconstrued as regressions in access; instead, they reflect data purification, demographic shifts, and new student-based monitoring initiated after NEP 2020. With effect from 2022–23, UDISE+ adopted individual student-level data collection, aligned with NEP 2020's goal of universal tracking to achieve 100 percent enrolment up to secondary level by 2030.

This article, aligned with the mission of Education for All in India to promote equitable and data-driven education policy, analyzes enrolment trends from 2021-22 to 2024-25 exclusively using UDISE+ reports. It highlights emerging patterns, with a special focus on secondary education indicators, and underscores policy imperatives for sustainable progress.

India's school education system, comprising over 1.47 million schools, 10.1 million teachers, and 24.7 crore students (2024-25), represents the world's most extensive public education structure. Between 2021-22 and 2024-25, enrolment declined from 26.52 crore to 24.69 crore (–6.9%), primarily due to improved data validation and demographic transition.

Since 2022-23, UDISE+ has transitioned towards individual student-level tracking consistent with NEP 2020, enhancing transparency and enabling better planning across school levels.

Review of Literature

The UDISE+ reports from 2021-22 to 2024-25 represent a pivotal evolution in India's education data ecosystem, building on earlier systems like District Information System for Education

(DISE) and Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). Prior studies, such as those by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), emphasized aggregate school-level data for infrastructure and access (e.g., Mehrotra, 2018). However, NEP 2020 shifted the paradigm to granular, student-centric tracking, as evidenced in UDISE+ 2022–23 onward.

Recent analyses, including those by Arun C. Mehta (2024–25), highlight methodological shifts reducing "ghost" enrolments by 5–6% through Aadhaar integration and unique Education IDs. Literature on secondary enrolment (Dreze & Kingdon, 2001; ASER Centre, 2023) points to persistent challenges like age-grade mismatches and gender disparities, with Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) stagnating below 80% in many states. This article extends these insights by longitudinally examining UDISE+ data for patterns in GER, Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), Adjusted-NER, age-specific enrolment, dropout, retention, transition rates, and Gender Parity Index (GPI) at secondary levels, revealing state-specific imperatives.

Data Sources: Recent Developments and Changes

The analysis draws exclusively from official UDISE+ reports issued by the Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education:

UDISE+ 2021–22 Flash Statistics: Aggregate school-level data, reference date 30 September 2021, total pages 205. UDISE+ 2022–23 Official Report: First year of student-wise microdata, reference date 31 March 2023, total pages 188. UDISE+ 2023–24 Official Report: Continued student-level collection with Aadhaar validation, reference date 31 March 2024, total pages 192. UDISE+ 2024–25 Official Report: Enhanced with NEP-aligned indicators, reference date 31 March 2025, total pages 189.

Key recent developments include:

Transition to Student-Wise Data (2022–23 Onward): Shift from school-aggregated to individual-level reporting, enabling unique Education ID (EID) tracking and reducing duplicates by ~14 million students in 2022–23 alone. Aadhaar Integration and Validation: Voluntary Aadhaar linkage reached 95% by 2024–25, eliminating ghost enrolments and improving beneficiary targeting for schemes like Samagra Shiksha. Updated Population Projections: Denominators for GER/NER now use Sample Registration System (SRS) birth rates and UIDAI saturation data, enhancing accuracy but rendering pre-2022–23 figures non-comparable. NEP 2020 Alignment: New fields for foundational literacy/numeracy, vocational education, and disaggregated planning; reference date changed to 31 March for better progression tracking.

These changes have improved data reliability but introduced a ~3–4% apparent decline due to purification, not actual dropouts. The enrolment data for classes I to XII in India is now regarded as more accurate, particularly with the establishment of authentic reporting by 2024–25. However, the persistent decline in enrolment beyond 2022–23 raises serious concerns about the quality and reliability of these statistics. Significant efforts by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) from 1994 to 2018 strengthened the Educational Management Information System (EMIS), yielding notable achievements. These

included the establishment of MIS Units at block, district, state, and national levels, enabling data availability at disaggregated levels – cluster, block, district, and state – with reduced time lags. Intensive data sharing was facilitated through over 130 regular annual publications by NIEPA. However, many of these gains were lost after the District Information System for Education (DISE) was transferred to the Ministry of Education. DISE was restructured into UDISE+, built on a robust foundation laid by NIEPA under the leadership of the late Prof. Yash Aggarwal during the early phase of DISE, followed by rigorous efforts from Prof. Arun C. Mehta, the founding Head of NIEPA's EMIS Department. Despite these advancements, the ongoing decline in enrolment data calls into question the effectiveness of current systems in maintaining reliable and high-quality statistics.

UDISE+ 2018-19 to 2024–25 datasets published by the Ministry of Education. Shift from aggregate to student-level data with a unique Education ID (EID). Integration of Aadhaar for verification to remove duplicate enrolments. Revised population projections using SRS and UIDAI data.

All-India Enrolment Trends (2021–22 to 2024–25)

National-Level Trends

The data on All India Total Enrolment for classes I to XII from 2021–22 to 2024–25 reveals a consistent decline in student numbers, with varying rates of decrease and distinct phases of educational system adjustments. Starting with 25.57 crore students in 2021–22, described as a post-lockdown recovery year, enrolment was at its peak, likely reflecting a rebound in school attendance as pandemic restrictions eased. However, the following year, 2022–23, saw a significant drop of 1.41 crore students, a 5.51% decrease, coinciding with the introduction of student-level tracking systems. This suggests that improved data collection may have revealed discrepancies, such as duplicate or outdated records, contributing to the sharp decline.

India: Total School Enrolment (I–XII)	**YEAR**	**ENROLMENT (CRORE)**	**CHANGE**	**% CHANGE**	**REMARKS**
	2021–22	25.57	—	—	Post-lockdown recovery
	2022–23	24,16	-1.41	-5.51%	Student-level tracking begins
	2023–24	23.50	-0.66	-2.73%	Data stabilization phase
	2024–25	23.29	-0.21	-0.89%	Authentic reporting established

In 2023–24, enrolment continued to fall, but at a slower pace, decreasing by 0.66 crore students, or 2.73%, as the system entered a data stabilization phase. This moderation in the rate of decline indicates that the initial adjustments from tracking mechanisms were settling, with fewer corrections needed. By 2024–25, the decline slowed further to just 0.21 crore students, a minimal 0.89% drop, with the remark noting the establishment of authentic reporting. This suggests that the enrolment figures became more reliable, reflecting a truer picture of student participation.

Overall, the period from 2021–22 to 2024–25 shows a cumulative enrolment decrease of 2.28 crore (-8.92%) students, with the annual rate of decline steadily reducing from 5.51% to 0.89%. The remarks highlight a progression from recovery to refined data systems, suggesting that while enrolment numbers are falling, the data itself is becoming more accurate. Potential factors like demographic shifts, dropout rates, or migration could contribute to the decline, but the improving reliability of reporting offers a clearer foundation for future educational planning.

Level-Wise Distribution

The level-wise enrolment data for classes I to XII in India from 2021–22 to 2024–25 paints a picture of consistent decline across all educational stages – Primary (I–V), Upper Primary (VI–VIII), Secondary (IX–X), and Higher Secondary (XI–XII) – with varying degrees of reduction and underlying factors. This analysis explores the trends, integrates the remarks, and addresses concerns about data reliability stemming from the transition of data systems, while confirming the accuracy of the provided calculations.

Enrolment by Level of Education (2021–22 to 2024–25)	LEVEL (FIGURES IN CRORE)	2021–22	2024–25	CHANGE	% CHANGE	REMARKS
	Primary (I–V)	12.18	10.44	-1.74	-14.29%	Declining child population?
	Upper Primary (VI–VIII)	6.68	6.37	-0.31	-4.64%	Smaller cohort sizes
	Secondary (IX–X)	3.85	3.71	-0.14	-3.64%	Stable retention
	Higher Secondary (XI–XII)	2.86	2.76	-0.10	-3.50%	Higher transition loss

In 2021–22, the total enrolment across all levels stood at 25.57 crore, with Primary education accounting for the largest share at 12.18 crore students. By 2024–25, this figure dropped to 23.28 crore, with Primary enrolment falling sharply to 10.44 crore, a decline of 1.74 crore students or 14.29%. This significant drop, the largest among all levels, is attributed to a potential "declining child population," suggesting demographic shifts like lower birth rates may be reducing the number of school-age children. However, the scale of this decline raises questions about whether it fully reflects demographic trends or includes data corrections, such as the removal of duplicate records, especially given the historical context of data system changes.

The Upper Primary level (VI–VIII) saw a more moderate decline, moving from 6.68 crore in 2021–22 to 6.37 crore in 2024–25, a reduction of 0.31 crore or 4.64%. This points to a natural progression from the shrinking Primary cohort, as fewer students enter the upper primary stage. This suggests that the decline is partly a ripple effect of demographic changes, though retention challenges or incomplete enrolment capture in certain regions could also play a role.

At the Secondary level (IX–X), enrolment decreased from 3.85 crore to 3.71 crore, a drop of 0.14 crore or 3.64%. The remark of "stable retention" indicates that this stage is relatively resilient, possibly due to policies promoting completion of class X or societal emphasis on

secondary education as a milestone. The modest decline suggests that most students who reach this level continue, with fewer dropouts compared to earlier stages.

The Higher Secondary level (XI–XII) experienced the smallest decline, from 2.86 crore to 2.76 crore, a reduction of 0.10 crore or 3.50%. The remark of "higher transition loss" highlights challenges in retaining students after class X, potentially due to economic pressures, early workforce entry, or limited access to higher secondary schools, particularly in rural areas. Despite this, the small percentage drop suggests some stability, as many students who reach this stage are committed to completing their schooling.

Nevertheless, the sharp Primary decline and ongoing reductions across levels suggest a need to investigate whether demographic trends, dropouts, or data system transitions are driving the numbers. Restoring the transparency and rigor of NIEPA's EMIS era could help ensure that UDISE+ delivers reliable statistics, supporting effective educational planning to address these declines.

Gender Patterns

The gender composition of enrolment data for classes I to XII in India from 2021–22 to 2024–25 reveals a complex picture of declining overall enrolment, marginal improvements in girls' share, and persistent gender disparities across educational levels.

Gender Composition of Enrolment	Educational Level	Year	Boys	Girls	Total	Girls' Share (%)	GPI
	Total, I-XII	2021–22	132849055	122891568	255740623	48.05	0.93
		2024–25	120065998	112819602	232885600	48.44	0.94
	Primary, I-V	2021–22	63517655	58324595	121842250	47.87	1.03
		2024–25	54299931	50081416	104381347	47.98	1.00
	Upper Primary, VI-VIII	2021–22	34511750	32278942	66790692	48.33	1.00
		2024–25	32873194	30821906	63695100	48.39	1.00
	Secondary, IX-X	2021–22	20071918	18456713	38528631	47.90	1.00
		2024–25	19108582	18056854	37165436	48.59	1.00
	Higher Secondary, XI-XII	2021–22	14747732	13831318	28579050	48.40	1.02
		2024–25	13784291	13859426	27643717	50.14	1.10

Overall Enrolment Trends and Girls' Share

In 2021–22, the total enrolment across classes I to XII stood at 25.57 crore (255,740,623), with girls comprising 12.29 crore (48.05%) and boys 13.28 crore. By 2024–25, total enrolment dropped to 23.29 crore (232,885,600), a decline of 2.29 crore, consistent with earlier data. Girls' enrolment fell from 12.29 crore to 11.28 crore, but their share slightly increased to 48.44%. This marginal rise in girls' share suggests that girls' enrolment declined at a slower rate than boys' (from 13.28 crore to 12.01 crore), indicating some progress in closing the gender gap. However, the overall decline raises questions about access, retention, and the reliability of the data.

The GPI, which measures the ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment (GPI = 1 indicates parity), remained stable at 1.00 for the total enrolment in 2021–22 against 0.94 for 2024–25 in the data. This stability in GPI, despite declining numbers, indicates that efforts to promote girls' education have prevented a disproportionate drop in their enrolment, but absolute numbers are still concerning. The GPI by levels presented below are based on GER of the respective levels and not on absolute numbers.

Girls' enrolment in India from 2021–22 to 2024–25 shows a mixed story: while absolute numbers declined by 1.01 crore, girls' share increased slightly (48.05% to 48.44%), with notable gains at Higher Secondary (50.14%, GPI 1.10). This reflects progress in gender equity, likely driven by targeted policies, but the overall enrolment drop signals challenges in access and retention, particularly at Primary. Data reliability remains a concern, as the transition to UDISE+ may have introduced inconsistencies. Policymakers must leverage UDISE+'s foundation to ensure accurate data, address barriers to girls' education, and sustain progress toward gender parity.

State-Wise Enrolment Changes (Pre-Primary to Hr. Secondary)

This analysis examines the state-wise changes in school enrolment across India from 2021-22 to 2024-25, based on data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISEPlus). The dataset encompasses enrolment figures for all types of management (government, private, and aided institutions) across various educational levels: Pre-Primary, Primary (Classes 1-5), Upper Primary (Classes 6-8), Secondary (Classes 9-10), Higher Secondary (Classes 11-12), Elementary (Classes 1-8), and Primary to Higher Secondary (Classes 1-12). The analysis focuses on total enrolment trends, gender disparities, and state-specific variations, providing a scholarly and professional assessment of the data.

State-Wise Enrolment Changes 2021–22 to 2024–25	STATE	2021–22 (LAKH)	2024–25 (LAKH)	CHANGE	% CHANGE	HIGHLIGHTS
	Uttar Pradesh	471.8	427.9	-43.9	-9.3%	Large rural verification corrections
	Bihar	274.7	211.3	-63.4	-23.1%	Biggest decline: migration, age-shift

State-Wise Enrolment Changes 2021–22 to 2024–25	STATE	2021–22 (LAKH)	2024–25 (LAKH)	CHANGE	% CHANGE	HIGHLIGHTS
	Maharashtra	225.9	212.7	-13.2	-5.8%	Urban migration impact
	Rajasthan	176.7	163.6	-13.1	-7.4%	Underutilization of small schools
	Madhya Pradesh	161.7	151.7	-10.0	-6.2%	Verification effect; balanced GER
	West Bengal	187.3	170.8	-16.5	-8.8%	System integration underway
	Tamil Nadu	128.3	125.2	-3.1	-2.4%	Demographic contraction

The data reveals significant regional disparities in enrolment trends, with some states demonstrating growth while others experienced substantial declines.

States with Enrolment Growth

Telangana: Total enrolment increased by 7.85% (+542,610 students), driven by a remarkable 286.17% surge in Pre-Primary enrolment (+433,818 students). Upper Primary (+4.09%) and Secondary (+3.12%) levels also grew, though Higher Secondary saw a slight decline (-0.93%). This suggests effective educational interventions or improved access in the state. Andhra Pradesh: Total enrolment rose by 2.55% (+210,170 students), with a 610.10% increase in Pre-Primary enrolment (+472,159 students) and an 11.90% rise in Higher Secondary (+110,971 students). However, Primary (-12.21%) and Elementary (-6.54%) levels declined, indicating a shift toward early and higher education. Odisha: Total enrolment grew marginally by 0.89% (+67,159 students), with a significant 33.22% increase in Higher Secondary enrolment (+229,324 students) and an 81.08% rise in Pre-Primary (+40,033 students). Declines in Primary (-7.34%) and Elementary (-3.83%) were offset by gains at higher levels. Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu: Total enrolment increased by 10.10% (+13,467 students), with Pre-Primary (+168.19%, +8,596 students) and Secondary (+16.12%, +3,010 students) showing strong growth. This reflects targeted efforts to enhance educational access in smaller Union Territories.

States with Enrolment Declines

Bihar: Total enrolment fell by 23.08% (-6,339,464 students), with Primary (-27.55%, -3,906,610 students) and Elementary (-25.50%, -5,466,344 students) experiencing the steepest declines. Secondary (-23.45%) and Pre-Primary (-16.65%) also saw significant reductions, suggesting challenges in retention, migration, or data reporting accuracy. Uttar Pradesh: Total enrolment decreased by 9.31% (-4,392,091 students), with Primary (-19.86%, -4,801,759 students) and Elementary (-14.30%, -5,115,357 students) showing major drops. Pre-Primary enrolment, however, increased by 241.11% (+981,396 students), indicating a focus on early education. West Bengal: Total enrolment declined by 8.82% (-1,651,856 students), with significant reductions in Pre-Primary (-30.06%, -471,449 students) and Primary (-11.39%, -907,011 students). Secondary enrolment grew by 7.18% (+198,591 students), but Higher Secondary fell by 21.64% (-434,966

students). Rajasthan: Total enrolment decreased by 7.38% (-1,303,323 students), with Primary (-18.54%, -1,531,122 students) and Elementary (-13.08%, -1,643,218 students) showing substantial declines. Pre-Primary enrolment increased by 107.88% (+531,293 students).

%age Share of State Enrolment to Total Enrolment: UDISEPlus 2024-15	India/ State	Elementary (1-8) Boys	Elementary (1-8) Girls	Elementary (1-8) Total	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Boys	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Girls	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Total
	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03
	Andhra Pradesh	3.27	3.29	3.28	3.37	3.42	3.39
	Arunachal Pradesh	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.13	0.12
	Assam	2.83	3.07	2.94	2.66	2.97	2.81
	Bihar	9.31	9.71	9.50	8.69	9.17	8.92
	Chandigarh	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.10
	Chhattisgarh	2.29	2.39	2.34	2.20	2.37	2.28
	D & N & D & D	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
	Delhi	1.73	1.67	1.70	1.82	1.76	1.79
	Goa	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.12
	Gujarat	4.72	4.50	4.62	4.67	4.39	4.53
	Haryana	2.33	2.14	2.24	2.41	2.19	2.31
	Himachal Pradesh	0.49	0.48	0.49	0.53	0.52	0.53
	Jammu and Kashmir	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.95	0.94	0.94
	Jharkhand	3.09	3.15	3.12	3.01	3.11	3.06
	Karnataka	4.86	4.91	4.88	4.88	5.01	4.94
	Kerala	2.16	2.23	2.19	2.35	2.42	2.39
	Ladakh	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	Lakshadweep	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Madhya Pradesh	6.14	6.12	6.13	5.96	5.92	5.94
	Maharashtra	8.72	8.61	8.67	9.14	8.85	9.00
	Manipur	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.25	0.26	0.25
	Meghalaya	0.41	0.44	0.43	0.35	0.40	0.38
	Mizoram	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.10
	Nagaland	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.15
	Odisha	3.17	3.23	3.20	3.21	3.28	3.24

%age Share of State Enrolment to Total Enrolment: UDISEPlus 2024-15	India/ State	Elementary (1-8) Boys	Elementary (1-8) Girls	Elementary (1-8) Total	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Boys	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Girls	Primary to Higher Secondary (1-12) Total
	Puducherry	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.09
	Punjab	2.12	1.98	2.05	2.22	2.06	2.14
	Rajasthan	6.59	6.40	6.50	6.74	6.43	6.59
	Sikkim	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
	Tamil Nadu	4.52	4.57	4.55	4.85	4.97	4.91
	Telangana	2.93	2.93	2.93	2.93	2.97	2.95
	Tripura	0.27	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.28	0.28
	Uttar Pradesh	18.46	18.00	18.24	18.11	17.42	17.78
	Uttarakhand	0.93	0.89	0.91	0.97	0.93	0.95
	West Bengal	6.67	6.96	6.81	6.63	7.11	6.86

Note: Compiled and calculated by Prof. Arun C Mehta, https://educationforallinindia.com

Smaller States/UTs

Lakshadweep: Total enrolment decreased by 9.28% (-1,261 students), with Higher Secondary (-40.04%) and Secondary (-3.68%) showing significant declines. The small population size amplifies percentage changes, making trends appear more pronounced. Sikkim: Total enrolment fell by 13.52% (-18,387 students), with sharp declines in Secondary (-25.25%) and Higher Secondary (-25.21%). Pre-Primary enrolment grew modestly by 5.79% (+1,136 students).

The observed trends have significant implications for India's education system. The substantial decline in Primary and Elementary enrolment, particularly in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, raises concerns about access, retention, and potential shifts to private institutions. Possible causes include: Demographic Shifts: A declining child population in certain states may reduce overall enrolment; Migration: Movement to urban areas or private schools could explain declines in public school enrolment; Dropouts: Economic pressures, inadequate infrastructure, or lack of incentives may contribute to higher dropout rates, especially at the Primary level, and Data Reporting Issues: Inconsistencies in UDISEPlus data collection could affect accuracy. The mixed trends at Secondary and Higher Secondary levels suggest varying regional capacities to retain students, necessitating targeted interventions in underperforming states, and the surge in Pre-Primary enrolment is a positive development, likely driven by NEP 2020's focus on ECCE.

Dominant States in India's School Enrolment Shares: UDISEPlus 2024-25

The UDISEPlus 2024-25 data on percentage shares of state-wise enrolment to national totals underscores the disproportionate contribution of a few populous states to India's overall school enrolment landscape. For Elementary education (Classes 1-8), Uttar Pradesh dominates with

18.24% of the total, followed by Bihar (9.50%), Maharashtra (8.67%), West Bengal (6.81%), and Rajasthan (6.50%). These five states collectively account for approximately 49.72% of national Elementary enrolment, highlighting their role as primary drivers of enrolment volumes amid broader declines. Similarly, for Primary to Higher Secondary (Classes 1-12), Uttar Pradesh leads at 17.78%, with Maharashtra (9.00%), Bihar (8.92%), West Bengal (6.86%), and Rajasthan (6.59%) comprising about 49.15% of the total. Madhya Pradesh, while significant (6.13% in Elementary and 5.94% in 1-12), ranks sixth, reflecting its substantial but secondary influence.

This concentration amplifies the impact of enrolment declines in these states – such as Bihar's 23.1% drop and Uttar Pradesh's 9.3% reduction – on national figures, exacerbating challenges to universalization goals under NEP 2020. Gender patterns show minor variations, with Uttar Pradesh exhibiting a slight female underrepresentation (18.00% vs. 18.46% for boys in Elementary), while states like Tamil Nadu (4.97% female share in 1-12) demonstrate stronger equity. Policy efforts must prioritize these high-share states to mitigate systemic risks, focusing on retention, data accuracy, and equitable access to sustain national progress toward 100% secondary enrolment by 2030.

Secondary Education Indicators: 2024–25

Secondary-Level Performance Indicators	INDICATOR	2021–22	2024–25	CHANGE	OBSERVATION
	GER (IX–X)	79.6	78.7	-0.9	Stable participation
	NER (IX–X)	47.9	47.5	-0.4	Marginal DEcline
	Adjusted NER, Secondary	64.7	59.8	-1.8	Age-appropriate enrolment improving
	Dropout Rate, Secondary	12.6	11.5	-1.1	Steady reduction
	Retention (I–X)	64.7	62.9	1.8	Stagnation; plateau effect
	Transition (VIII–IX)	88.8	86.6	-2.2	Need for intervention
	GPI (Secondary GER)	1.00	1.01	+0.01	Gender equity maintained

The status of universal secondary education in India, as reflected in the 2024–25 UDISEPlus data presented above, gives a mixed picture with progress in some areas and persistent challenges in others. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Classes IX–X slightly declined from 79.6% in 2021–22 to 78.7% in 2024–25, indicating stable but not universal participation. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) saw a marginal decline from 47.9% to 47.5%, and the Adjusted NER dropped from 64.7% to 59.8%, suggesting challenges in ensuring age-appropriate enrolment. However, positive developments include a reduction in the dropout rate from 12.6% to 11.5% and a Gender Parity Index (GPI) improving slightly from 1.00 to 1.01, reflecting sustained gender equity.

The transition rate from Class VIII to IX decreased from 88.8% to 86.6%, and retention from Class I to X stagnated at 62.9%, down from 64.7%, indicating a plateau effect in progression. Achieving universal secondary education by 2030, as aligned with Sustainable Development

Goal 4, remains challenging due to the slow pace of improvement in NER and retention rates, coupled with regional disparities and a 6.90% overall enrolment decline from 2021–22 to 2024–25. To meet this goal, India must accelerate interventions to enhance transition and retention, address socio-economic barriers, and scale up infrastructure and teacher training, particularly in states with significant enrolment declines like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Without intensified efforts, achieving universal secondary education by 2030 appears ambitious but uncertain.

Diagnostic Insights and Policy Priorities

The analysis presented above gives several indications, including the following:

States needing urgent attention: Bihar (–23.1%), Uttar Pradesh (–9.3%), Rajasthan (–7.4%), and Madhya Pradesh (–6.2%) risk derailing universalisation goals. Stock-taking essential: UDISE+ datasets must serve as diagnostic, not mere reporting instruments, for precise forecasting and planning. It must move towards providing real-time data, which was core at the time of shifting UDISE from NIEPA to the Ministry in 2018. Micro-planning needed: Nearly 45% of government schools have enrolment under 60 – NIEPA must develop a specialized planning module for small schools. Data utilization: District-level educational planning must use UDISE+ analytics for localized interventions on retention, infrastructure, and coverage.

Concluding Observations

The UDISE+ data from 2021–22 to 2024–25 reveals a complex trajectory for India's school education system, marked by a significant 6.9% decline in total enrolment (from 26.52 crore to 24.69 crore students), with primary education experiencing the steepest drop (-14.29%) and secondary education showing relative stability (-3.64%). This decline, attributed to data purification through Aadhaar-linked student-level tracking, demographic transitions, and potential socio-economic factors, underscores both progress and challenges in achieving universal secondary education by 2030, as mandated by NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4. The transition to individual-level data collection since 2022–23 has enhanced transparency, reducing ghost enrolments by approximately 5–6%, but persistent declines, particularly in states like Bihar (-23.1%), Uttar Pradesh (-9.3%), and Rajasthan (-7.4%), signal an urgent need for targeted interventions.

Secondary education indicators reflect stable participation (GER: 78.7%) and reduced dropout rates (11.5%), but stagnating retention (62.9%) and declining transition rates (86.6%) highlight barriers to progression. Gender equity remains robust (GPI: 1.01), yet absolute enrolment losses, especially at the primary level, threaten the pipeline to secondary education. The concentration of small schools (45% with enrolment below 60) and regional disparities necessitate micro-planning, real-time data utilization, and district-level analytics to address retention, infrastructure gaps, and access inequities. Without accelerated policy measures – particularly in high-decline states – and a revival of NIEPA's robust EMIS framework for timely, disaggregated data, achieving universal secondary education by 2030 remains an ambitious but uncertain goal. Policymakers must prioritize localized interventions, leveraging UDISE+ as a diagnostic tool to ensure equitable, sustainable progress toward universal education.

Suggested Readings

Ministry of Education. (2021–25). UDISE+ Annual Reports. DoSEL.

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