

Provisions for Deprived Groups (SEDGs) in NEP 2020

Major policy initiatives related to formal education in India includes National Policy on Education 1986, which was modified in 1992 and New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. All of these policies stressed on importance of education in mother tongue and need for preparing teaching/learning materials in local languages. Various 5 year plans also recognized need for empowerment of socio-economically underprivileged groups through educational development. 11th 5-year plan (2007-2012) included one prime goal that up to 2007 every child should attain school. While this period, 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009' laid down legal underpinnings for achieving universal elementary education. NEP 2020 also laid stress for education in native language, vocational education, compulsory school education and holistic multidisciplinary education. The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.



Editor-in-Chief
Dr. Amit Soni

NEP 2020 acclaims that main aim and purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. One of the major thrust of NEP is full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.

According to NEP 2020, School education will start at the age of 3 years and continue up to 18 years in different stages of foundational (preschool-class 2), preparatory (class 3-5), middle (class 6-8) and secondary (class 9-12). Higher education includes Graduation, Postgraduation and Doctorate degrees with multiple entry and exit provisions and Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). Multidisciplinary Graduation may be of 3 years or Graduation with research of 4 years. Accordingly, Postgraduation may be of 2 years and 1 year. Candidate having 4 years Graduation or Postgraduation degree will be eligible for doing doctorate (Ph.D.) degree.

Clause 6.2 of NEP elaborately describes Socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), they can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (Divyang including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).

According to U-DISE 2016-17 data, about 19.6% of students belong to Scheduled Castes (SC) at the primary level, but this fraction falls to 17.3% at the higher secondary level. These enrolment drop-offs are more severe for Scheduled Tribes (ST) students (10.6% to 6.8%), and differently abled children (1.1% to 0.25%), with even greater declines for female students within each of these categories. The decline in enrolment in higher education is even steeper (clause 6.2.1). A multiplicity of factors, including lack of access to quality schools, poverty, social mores & customs, historical & geographical factors and language have had a detrimental effect on rates of enrolment and retention among the SC, ST, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities and Divyang need special focus (clause 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4 and 6.2.5). Children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically. While several programmatic interventions to uplift children from tribal communities are currently in place, and will continue to be pursued.

While overall enrolments in schools decline steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 12, this decline in enrolments is significantly more pronounced for many of these SEDGs, with even greater declines for female students within each of these SEDGs and often even steeper in higher education (clause 6.2). Clause 3.2 and 3.3 of NEP 2020, talks about need for prevention of school dropped and bringing back dropped out back to school and also to prevent further dropping out of children. Clause 3.5 put emphasis on facilitating learning for all with special emphasis on SEDGs involving both formal and non-formal education modes. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools will offer extensive programmes in addition to the present programmes; vocational education courses/ programmes; and adult literacy and life enrichment programmes specially designed to deliver education in local languages.

Section 6 and 14 of NEP deals with equitable and inclusive education, i.e., learning for all is assumed as a greatest tool for achieving social justice, equality, bridging the social category gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes in school education and higher education. Clause 6.2.6 says that separate strategies will be formulated for focused attention on reducing the social category gaps in school education. In addition, clause 6.4 tells about successful policies and schemes such as targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to incentivize parents to send their children to school, providing bicycles for transport, etc., that have significantly increased participation of SEDGs in the schooling system in certain areas. These successful policies and schemes must be significantly strengthened across the country. According to clause 6.8, the Government of India will constitute a 'Gender Inclusion Fund' to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students. This fund will be granted to States for implementation of schemes related to girl education, such as, provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc.

Clause 6.9 specifies that additional Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and similar standard boarding schools will be built around the country, especially in aspirational districts, Special Education Zones, and other disadvantaged areas, to increase high-quality educational opportunities. NEP is in complete consonance with the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education. While preparing the National Curriculum Framework, NCERT will ensure that consultations are held with expert bodies such as National Institutes of DEPwD (clause 6.10 of NEP).

Clause 6.19 instructs that all participants in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students, will be sensitized to the requirements of all students, the notions of inclusion and equity, and the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons. Such an educational culture will provide the best pathway to help students become empowered individuals who, in turn, will enable society to transform into one that is responsible towards its most vulnerable citizens. Inclusion and equity will become a key aspect of teacher education (and training for all leadership, administrative, and other positions in schools); efforts will be made to recruit more high-quality teachers and leaders from SEDGs in order to bring in excellent role models for all students. All the challenges related to improvement of school education will, by 2025, be addressed by State/UT governments by adopting innovative mechanisms to group or rationalize schools (clause 7.6).

Clause 9.3 upholds that the NEP envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to overcome challenges and thereby deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion. The policy's vision includes development of more number of autonomous universities and colleges near every district (clause 10.8) offering medium of instruction or programmes in local/Indian languages with emphasis on fruitful research work and multidisciplinary undergraduate education (clause 10.7). It also stress on increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students; online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL); and all infrastructure and learning materials accessible and available to learners with disabilities. To achieve these goals focus will be on developing more number of multidisciplinary higher educational institutions in every district by 2030 and to enhance student strength up to 2040 for optimal use of infrastructure and resources. The aim will be to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035. More over, quality online courses will be suitably integrated into curricula of HEIs, and blended mode will be preferred (clause 10.10).

Clause 12.4 states that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds require

encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education. Universities and colleges will thus be required to set up high-quality support centres and will be given adequate funds and academic resources to carry this out effectively. There will also be professional academic and career counselling available to all students, as well as counsellors to ensure physical, psychological and emotional well-being.

NEP ensures that global standards of quality education will be provided at affordable costs. Clause 12.10 specifies that efforts will be made to incentivize the merit of students belonging to SC, ST, OBC, and other SEDGs. The National Scholarship Portal will be expanded to support, foster, and track the progress of students receiving scholarships. Private HEIs will be encouraged to offer larger numbers of free ships and scholarships to their students.

Section 14 deals with equity and inclusion in higher education. It says that Entry into quality higher education can open a vast array of possibilities that can lift both individuals as well as communities out of the cycles of disadvantage. For this reason, making quality higher education opportunities available to all individuals must be among the highest priorities. It further stress on the approach to equity and inclusion must be common across school and higher education. Furthermore, there must be continuity across the stages to ensure sustainable reform. Guidelines are also provided to governments and HEIs for promotion of SEDGs, which majorly includes, financial support, scholarships, mitigating costs and fees, outreach programmes, gender balance, inclusive admission processes, inclusive curriculum and study in local language or bilingually, bridge courses, counselling and mentoring programmes for socio-emotional and academic support. More number of educational institutions need to be opened in the areas of SEDGs with wide accessibility and disabled friendly infrastructure. Sensitization of faculty, counsellor and students need to be ensured on the matters of gender equality, no-discrimination and anti-harassment rules. Section 16 puts more stress on encouraging formal vocational education. By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education, for which a clear action plan with targets and timelines will be developed.

Section 26 talks about financial provisions for development affordable and quality education for everybody as a Vishva Guru (clause 12.8). The NEP 2020 commits to significantly raising educational investment, as there is no better investment towards a society's future than the high-quality education of our young people. The current public (Government Centre and States) expenditure on education in India has been around 4.43% of GDP (Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure 2017-18) and only around 10% of the total Government spending towards education (Economic Survey 2017-18). The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest. This is considered extremely critical for achieving the high-quality and equitable public education system that is truly needed for India's future economic, social, cultural, intellectual, and technological progress and growth. Implementation (section 27) of this policy will be jointly executed and monitored by the Central and State Governments, Ministry of education (MoE) and Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE).

