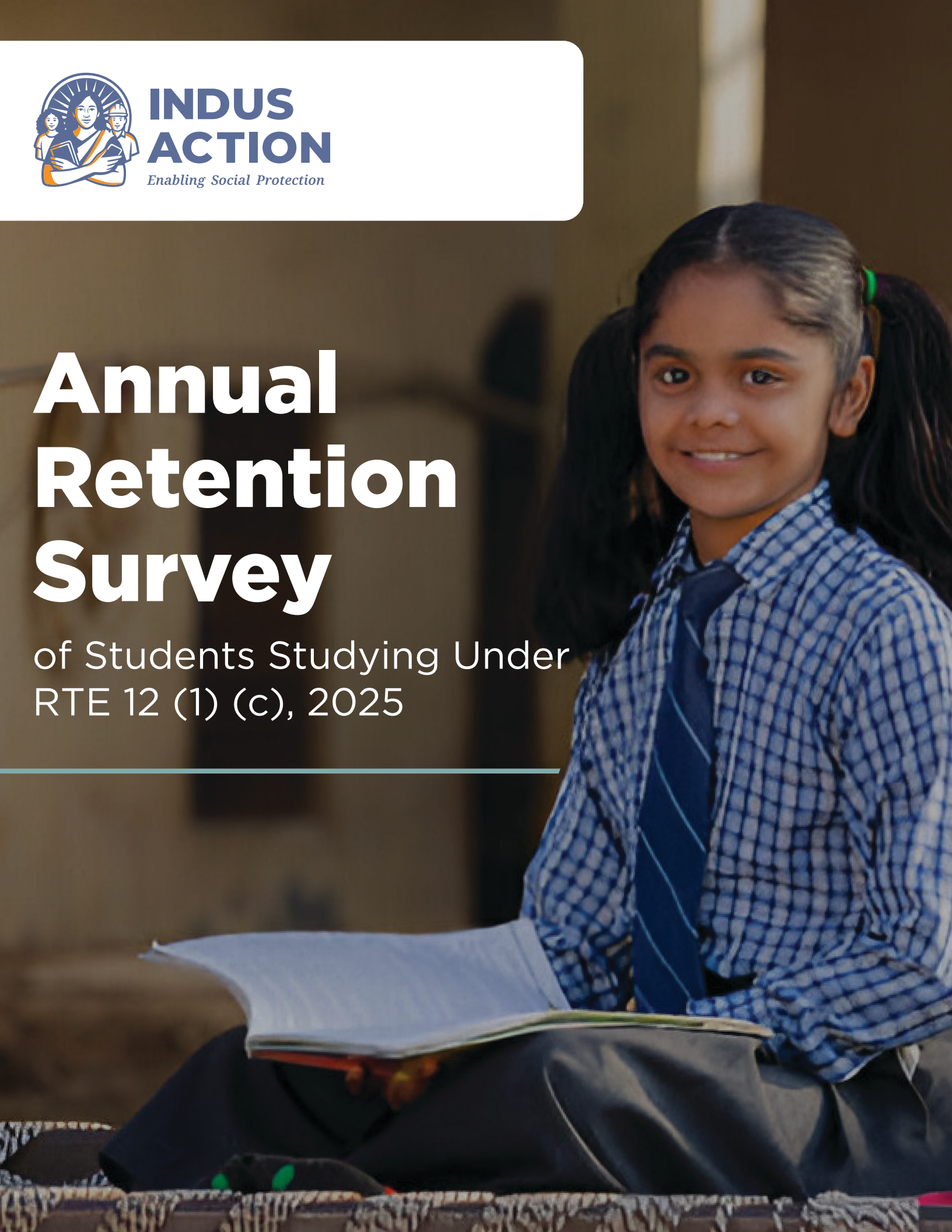
INDUS ACTION
Enabling Social Protection

Annual Retention Survey

of Students Studying Under RTE 12 (1) (c), 2025



Executive Summary

Retention Survey

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, through Section 12(1)(c), aims to expand access to schooling for disadvantaged children across India by mandating 25% seats in private schools for economically weaker sections and disadvantaged students. However, access alone is not enough—continued enrolment over time and inclusiveness in school environments are essential factors that need to be studied. To address this gap, Indus Action, in collaboration with a team from Georgetown University's Master's in International Development Policy programme, conducted a multi-state survey to examine the retention and inclusion of students admitted under RTE Section 12(1)(c). The 2025 Retention Survey builds on previous efforts and analyses two cohorts: a longitudinal panel of students admitted in 2021–22 and a cross-sectional sample of students admitted in 2023–24. This dual-cohort approach allows for both time-based comparisons and insights into more recent trends.

Retention Survey

The findings are encouraging, with high overall retention rates—93% for the more recent 2023–24 cohort and 87% for the older 2021–22 group. However, these averages mask important heterogeneity. For instance, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh have comparatively lower retention rates, driven by factors such as long distances to schools, unaffordable associated costs, and administrative hurdles. These localised barriers suggest that averages can obscure significant state-level challenges.

Gender differences also emerge as a key dimension. Girls tend to stay enrolled at higher rates than boys, yet they are also more likely to report experiences of discrimination within schools. This divergence—higher retention yet increased perceptions of discrimination—highlights the need to treat inclusion and retention as distinct policy issues. While retention suggests progress in enrolment continuity, inclusion metrics raise concerns about the quality of students' everyday experiences, especially for girls.

Affordability remains a major barrier to meaningful access. Despite RTE 12(1)(c)'s legal commitment to free education, many families—particularly in Andhra Pradesh—report difficulties affording mandatory school-related expenses. In fact, 94% of families in Andhra Pradesh report having to pay fees, and most find it challenging. These costs not only compromise the principle of free education but may also threaten long-term retention among the poorest families.

Discrimination is another area of concern. The survey found that students in Odisha under RTE 12(1)(c) report higher levels of discrimination, especially in interactions with peers and teachers. In contrast, students in Andhra Pradesh report more

positive inclusion experiences. The findings also suggest that perceived discrimination does not neatly align with retention data, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that address both continued access and dignity in education.

Moreover, analysis of household asset ownership and sibling enrolment indicates that the policy may not be consistently reaching the most economically vulnerable households. Targeting appears broadly aligned with the RTE's social inclusion goals— our analysis finds that only 0.92% of students fall outside the intended beneficiary groups[1]. However, there are indicators that more vulnerable eligible families face exclusion due to affordability, lack of awareness, or bureaucratic complexity.

Policy recommendations

Crucially, the report emphasises the need to interpret RTE 12(1)(c) implementation not only through aggregate outcomes but also through local dynamics and lived experiences. state-level variation in retention, perceived discrimination, and affordability reveals that the success of the policy depends on how it is interpreted, supported, and enforced on the ground. These findings reinforce the importance of continuous monitoring and reforms that are sensitive to each context.

To ensure that RTE 12(1)(c) fulfils its promise of fair and inclusive education, the report highlights the need for local solutions tailored to each state's specific challenges. Although overall retention is high, persistent barriers in states like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha must be addressed, whether in the form of school-related costs, on-ground implementation, or long travel distances.

Tackling discrimination requires action at the school level to promote inclusion, especially for EWS students and girls, with Odisha standing out as a key area for intervention. Ensuring that education is genuinely free is also critical, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, where many families continue to face financial burdens. Lastly, while the policy is largely reaching its intended groups, it is essential to better inform and support families who are eligible but still struggle to apply or remain enrolled. A more flexible and responsive model, grounded in regular monitoring can help ensure the RTE 12(1)(c) provision as a meaningful educational opportunity for children across India.

[1] Families who would not be able to afford schooling in the same schools in the absence of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements

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We are immensely thankful to the authors Duana Blach De Macedo Miranda, Meenakshi Alagusundaram, and Ritwika Rituparna for choosing and diligently executing the Retention Survey as their Capstone project for the Master of International Development Policy Programme. Their rigour and commitment have significantly contributed to the 2025 iteration of the retention survey.

We are thankful to Indus Action team member Atuldeep, who diligently served as a Project Manager for the retention survey, ensuring seamless coordination, execution, and integration of efforts. His data diligence and leadership were vital for the success of this project. We are also grateful to Dr Rahul K Sharma and Umang Kamra, whose rigorous feedback greatly enhanced the quality of our work.

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We appreciate our dedicated enumerators: Devika, Farhan Maquesood, Himani Panwar, Hyma, Khushboo Chouhan, Rakshee Bhukta, Savita Chauhan, Shivani Pal, Suryaprakash, Tarangini Jagadala and Udaya Lakshmi. Their hard work and perseverance in collecting data have driven this report.

Last but not least, we owe this report to the State education departments in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttarakhand and to the parents and children who have provided us the opportunity to write about their experiences with RTE Section 12(1)(c).

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BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Literature Review

India has made substantial progress in increasing school enrolment rates over the past few decades. However, the country continues to grapple with serious concerns about the quality of education and student learning outcomes. The challenge is not just about enrolling children in schools but ensuring they acquire essential skills. Alarmingly, even after completing five years of schooling, many students still lack basic reading and arithmetic skills expected of those with just two or three years of education (Banerji, 2015). This gap in learning reflects deeper systemic issues, with socioeconomic factors playing a critical role.

Low parental education levels, in particular, perpetuate educational inequality, as children from underprivileged backgrounds struggle to receive adequate support for learning at home (Banerji, 2015). Compounding this issue is the inflexible structure of the Indian school system, which fails to accommodate students who fall behind the prescribed curriculum (Banerji, 2015). As a result, large numbers of children remain unable to catch up, leaving them at risk of long-term academic underachievement.

India's Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed in 2009, making education free and compulsory for all children between the ages of six and fourteen. While Article 21A of the Indian Constitution—inserted to the Constitution (by the Eighty-sixth Amendment Act, 2002)—guaranteed the Right to Education as a fundamental right for children aged six to fourteen years, it was through the implementation of the RTE Act that it came into effect. The Act was motivated by concerns that growth in private schooling would lead to increased segregation of schools and of classrooms, such that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would have difficulty in accessing quality education (Romero & Singh, 2022).

Private schools in India are generally divided into two categories—private aided and private unaided. According to Kingdon (2017), these schools differ in their operational models. Private aided schools, for instance, cannot charge fees for elementary classes (up to grade 8), and their operations are overseen by the Education Service Commission. On the other hand, private unaided schools function independently. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, under subsection 12(1)(c), requires both private aided and unaided schools—with exception of minority-run private schools—to reserve 25% of seats for children from economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups (DG). These groups include:

- Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)
  - Below Poverty Line (BPL); or
  - Family income is below the limit set by the respective state government
- Disadvantaged Groups (DG)[1]
  - Other Backward Classes (OBC)
  - Children With Special Needs (CWSN)
  - Scheduled Castes (SC)
  - Scheduled Tribes (ST)
  - Transgenders
  - CNCP (Child in Need of Care and Protection)
  - Children/Children of parents who are HIV positive
  - CWSN (Children with Special Needs)

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of private schools and an observed trend of increased enrolment in private schools (Kingdon, 2017). This phenomenon is likely linked to the perceived quality of private schools by parents, the medium of instruction, and the inadequate infrastructure of government schools, resulting in a decline in quality and creating an environment where parents seek better educational opportunities for their children in private schools (Jha & Parvati, 2014, Kingdon 2017). Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2013) also attribute this increase in the preference for private schools to the high actual and perceived labour market returns to English in India, which have led to growing demand for English-medium education in private schools, since majority of the government schools continue to have the regional languages as their medium of instruction. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Andhra Pradesh, private schools had slightly better test score gains than government schools in the same setting, even with substantially lower costs per student (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2013). Similarly, Woodhead, Frost, and James (2013) conducted a longitudinal study in Andhra Pradesh examining the impact of private schooling on educational opportunities. They found a notable increase in private school enrolment since 2002, particularly in urban areas, from 24% to 44% between two cohorts of children born in 1994-95 and 2001-02, respectively. Between 2010-11 and 2015-16, enrolments in private schools across 20 Indian states increased by 17.5 million, while those in government schools fell by 13 million across these states (Kingdon, 2017).

[1] Different states define their DG groups differently such that all states do not include transgenders, CNCP, HIV categories as eligible. However, we can generally consider these categories as DG.

The intention behind the RTE section 12(1)(c) was to ensure an inclusive environment for children from different backgrounds. While the policy has been implemented in over 20 states and union territories, there continues to be scope for improvement to ensure effectiveness through consistent monitoring and process improvement. Research also presents instances about discrimination faced by students enrolled under RTE 12(1)(c) such as RTE students being made to sit separately in different classrooms (Sarasvati, 2020; Yagnik, 2024) or being punished more than non-RTE students (Dehadray, 2019), indicating the need for improvements in implementation.

Further, the Paliwal (2021) study reports that the annual average dropout rate of SCs increased from 4.9% at the primary level to 6.6% at the upper primary level and further to 21.8% at the secondary level during 2017-18. Similarly, the annual average dropout of STs went from 3.7% at the primary level to 6.1% at the upper primary level to 22.3% at the secondary level. These numbers are much higher than the dropouts at the overall level (Paliwal, 2021).

While ample research is available on children's access to schools under RTE 12(1)(c) and potential constraints, there is a significant gap in research on retention rates and social inclusion experiences of children getting admissions under the provision. Thus, since 2017, Indus Action has been conducting retention surveys across various states in India (depending on the availability of data on a yearly basis). States surveyed in previous reports include Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Odisha—to determine whether the children who were admitted into private schools under RTE 12(1)(c) were still enrolled in the same schools. This is also an attempt to monitor the on-ground implementation of the policy and recommend evidence-based process and policy improvements to state governments.

Since 2024, Indus Action has partnered with Georgetown University's students pursuing the Master's in International Development Policy (MIDP) programme to design and update the questionnaire, support the survey implementation and the data analysis. The key objectives of working with the MIDP team for the Retention Survey 2025 were as follows:

1. Assessing whether and how the existing survey indicators can be revised, and formulating new survey questions accordingly
2. Enhancing the survey design and sampling methodology
3. Support the implementation for the 2025 RTE 12(1)(c) Retention Survey, by conducting high frequency checks
4. Gathering and analysing data from the survey to discern meaningful outcomes and indicators for retention and inclusion
5. Compiling a comprehensive report encompassing survey results and methodology, and suggesting next steps for future surveys and dissemination to the Indus Action team

INDUS ACTION RETENTION SURVEYS

Indus Action Retention Surveys

Since 2017, Indus Action has been conducting retention surveys across India to determine whether the children who were admitted into private schools under RTE 12(1)(c) were still enrolled in the same schools. This survey was introduced as a second phase to "Project Eklavya", an initiative by the organisation to support children in accessing the RTE 12(1)(c) provision to gain admissions into private schools. The purpose of this study initially was to administer a census, determine the number of students who have dropped out, and propose interventions that can improve the experience of RTE students studying in private schools. The scope of the survey has since expanded to capture challenges faced with the application process, the number of students switching to non-RTE enrolled schools, school-related expenditure incurred by parents or caregivers, and perceived inclusion of students in schools.

Indus Action has conducted these surveys via telephonic mode to ensure an extensive outreach for gaining insights, which would be operationally complex and time-consuming to achieve in in-person surveys. Since 2021, Indus Action has also been following a cohort of students from Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttarakhand as part of their longitudinal study to analyse the trends in retention across years with the same sample. This particular cohort is to further help us analyse how the implementation of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision has changed over the years within the context of the same regions and sample of students. Their most recent report, from the Retention Survey carried out last year, found an overall 87% retention rate within their studied regions (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024)

RETENTION SURVEYS 2025

Retention Survey 2025

The 2025 iteration of the survey includes the following aspects:

Revisions to the Survey

Much of the RTE literature in India has examined the discrimination faced by students from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) or Disadvantaged Groups (DG). Previous iterations of the Retention Survey have primarily focused on student retention rates, reasons behind dropout and parents' perception of schooling experiences. The 2025 Indus Action Retention Survey builds on this by exploring parents' or caregivers' perceptions of student experiences with teachers and/or peers, in addition to gauging the retention levels similar to previous cycles of the survey, offering deeper insights into students' school experiences.

Furthermore, the survey includes an analysis of school-related expenditures to further understand the dynamics and challenges related to the affordability of private education. As part of the Retention Survey 2025, an analysis of the targeting effectiveness of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision was also conducted, using asset ownership as a proxy for household income. This module, adapted from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), was intended to help assess whether the provision is successfully reaching children with the most significant economic need.

In consultation with Indus Action, the previous retention survey instrument was revised by the MIDP team by creating new questions and updating existing modules to answer the following research questions effectively in the Retention Survey 2025:

- Appropriate survey respondent:
  - Is the respondent the best-suited person to answer the questions regarding the child's experiences at school?
- Reasons for switching schools:
  - What is the detailed qualitative reason in cases of switching—such as discrimination or affordability—behind the student switching schools and leaving the enrolment under RTE Section 12(1)(c)?
- Perception of discrimination:
  - Is the student or parent/caregiver perceiving discrimination from teachers and/or peers? How are their overall experiences in school?
  - What is the proportion of children who are facing multiple/consistent types of discrimination?
- Affordability:
  - What is the proportion of parents/caregivers who find paying school fees or school-related ancillary fees difficult?
- Asset-related questions:
  - Using asset ownership as an income proxy, can we gauge income distribution among current RTE Section 12(1)(c) beneficiaries, and assess whether the Act effectively targets those with the most significant economic need?

Index Construction

To analyse the "Targeting" module, we used a statistical technique known as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to create an index summarising all the questions in each module. PCA essentially assigns weights to each variable, depending on how much it contributes to variation in the sample and the patterns in the overall data. In this context, we used PCA to create an asset index based on household asset ownership as a proxy for economic status.
After computing these index scores, we categorised respondents into quintiles (for asset index). This method facilitates comparisons across groups and helps us assess patterns of inequality. This categorisation enabled us to better understand the families accessing RTE 12(1)(c).

The asset index was created using the PCA method, summarising all the questions in the asset ownership module. In this case, we divide the scores into quintiles for our analysis[2]. We are mainly interested in the quintile with the highest score, the top 20% of the sample, and those with the lowest score, the bottom 20%. Based on the distribution below, we see that most of the sample is concentrated in the fourth quintile.

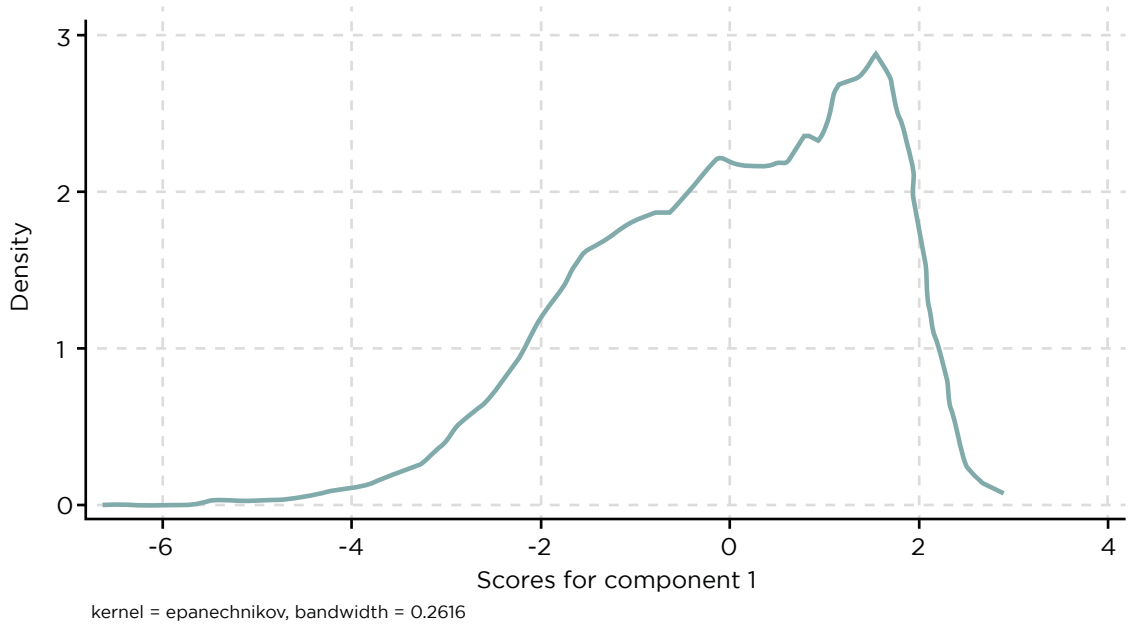


Figure 1: Kernel density estimate for asset index

[2] An important caveat to note is that 'top 20%' does not refer to respondents who are rich, but rather those who simply own the most assets within our particular sample.

Sampling and Data Collection

The Indus Action Retention Survey 2025 was administered as a phone-based survey across four states—Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. This version of the survey tracks two cohorts of students. The first cohort consists of those admitted under RTE 12(1)(c) in 2021–22 and who comprise the longitudinal cohort that will be followed in every iteration of the survey (Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttarakhand), and the second cohort are those students admitted under RTE 12(1)(c) in 2023–24 (Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha and one district from Bihar[3]).

In Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttarakhand, a stratified random sampling strategy was employed, with stratification based on gender, and 1500 respondents were selected in each state. For the 2021-22 cohort, which is part of the longitudinal survey, the survey carried forward the same sample of Chhattisgarh (2187), Uttarakhand (1167) and Odisha (390).

This iteration of the survey included two new modules that focused on the perception of inclusion and asset ownership. To ensure the reliability and clarity of these two modules, we conducted a pilot test of the new survey questionnaire with 15 respondents from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Uttarakhand. The responses obtained from this pilot study were analysed and helped us further refine the survey instrument that was to be used during the main data collection phase.

The data was collected over 8 weeks by state-specific enumerator teams. Throughout this time, the MIDP team supported the data collection efforts with weekly High-Frequency Checks that monitored indicators such as response rates, completion rates, and statistics by enumerator. These checks were then used to improve the quality and consistency of the data collection process.

During the data collection process, the Exotel software that was used for the phone surveys had a masking feature that routes calls via a temporary virtual phone number, hiding the actual number of the participants[4]. However, the limitation of this feature was that the calls would get blocked on respondents' phones if they had a 'Do Not Disturb' feature turned on. To account for these blocked calls, we conducted a resample of 90 IDs per state to ensure that we were not left with high attrition rates at the end of the data collection process.

[3] For Bihar, we had access to data of a small sample (n=155, with 63 respondents) from one district. While the responses are considered in the overall analysis, the sample is not utilised to make state-level analysis due to the limitation in the sample size.

[4] Exotel call masking

Response Rates

The survey was divided into multiple sections, each designed to capture a different dimension of the respondent's experience. To ensure the robustness of our analysis, we established a minimum threshold for what constitutes a 'completed' survey, based on the response to the question at the end of each section, gauging whether a respondent is still on the call. If a respondent has successfully answered this 'Respondent Still on Call' question at the end of the first three sections, we consider the survey to have been 'completed', even if there is missingness in the other answers—this is defined as 'completed' for the purpose of this report and counted as a unique observation in our analysis. Therefore, the response rates show the proportion of respondents who successfully completed the minimum threshold, shown as '% Surveys Completed' in Table 1 below.

If, for any reason, a respondent failed to complete the survey's minimum threshold, such as they hung up mid-way, or the call dropped, and the enumerators were unable to contact them again, it is defined as 'Calls Attempted,' as stated in Table 1 below. This process was followed due to the constraints of the respondents' unwillingness to answer some questions, as well as the survey tool (Form.io) not having mandatory fields in the data collection process, resulting in some missing data fields.

After accounting for the missingness in the data, based on the above-mentioned threshold for 'completed' survey, out of a total of 8,141 calls attempted across all the states, 3,488 parents/caregivers responded and 3446 surveys were completed, leading to a total response rate of 43%. While this was significantly lower than last year's response rate of 67% (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024), a few key reasons for non-completion of the survey could include: i) the phone numbers having the Do Not Disturb (DND) service enabled; ii) non-mandatory questions in the survey tool (Form.io) being used, leading to survey being submitted with missing data-fields iii) incorrect or outdated phone numbers; iv) phone numbers being switched off; or v) respondents requesting to reschedule[5], or refusing to respond, vi) partially complete surveys amongst other reasons.

Response rates did vary by cohorts, with the 2021–22 cohort having a lower response rate of 36% while the 2023–24 cohort saw a higher response rate of 50%. Some possible explanations for the lower response rate for the older cohort could be attrition, a greater incidence of relocation, phone number changes, or survey fatigue from doing the same survey every year. We also believe that in the case of the child having switched schools, parents/caregivers might be reluctant to go through the entire survey, seeing it as a futile exercise.

[5] Enumerators made four attempts at different times during the week to ensure survey completion, if the respondent rescheduled or had their phone switched off on all four attempts the observation was discarded.

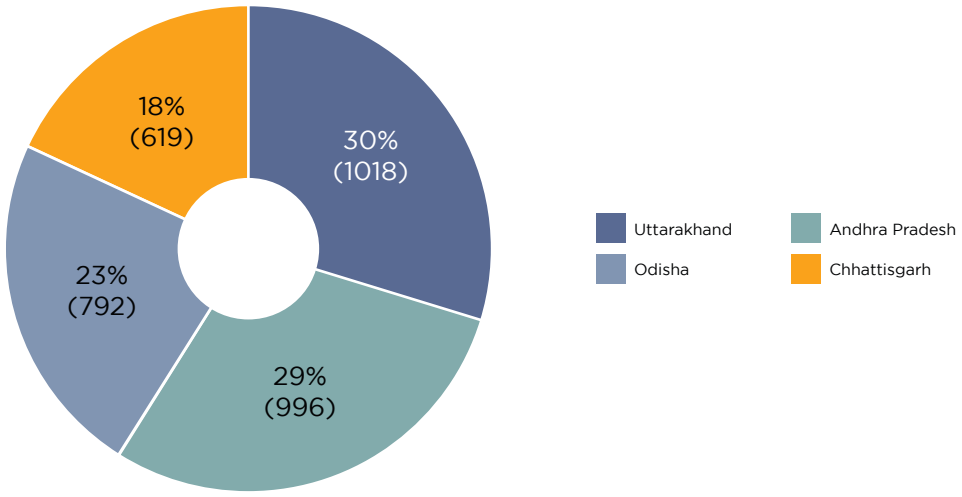
	Cohort 2021-22	Cohort 2023-24
Calls attempted	3264	4399
Surveys completed	1159	2208
% of Surveys completed	35.51	50.19

Table 1: Response rates in terms of calls attempted and surveys completed

Respondents' Composition

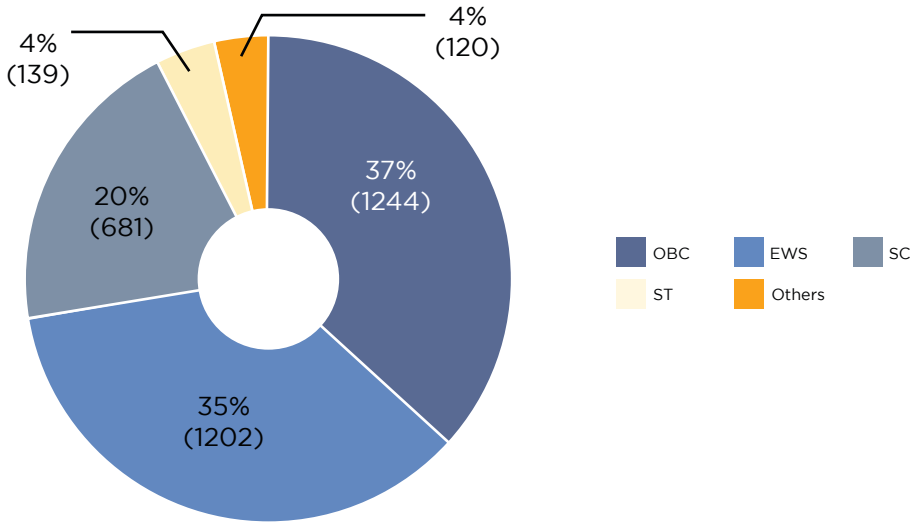
To better understand the composition of survey respondents, we analyse the distribution of the completed responses across the four states covered in the study, along with a breakdown by gender and application category. When we look at a breakdown of the overall response rates on the basis of states, inclusive of both the cohorts, Uttarakhand accounted for the largest share of completed surveys, representing 30% of the total responses, followed closely by Andhra Pradesh with 29%, Odisha with 23%, and Chhattisgarh with 18%.

Figure 2: Composition of total completed surveys by states



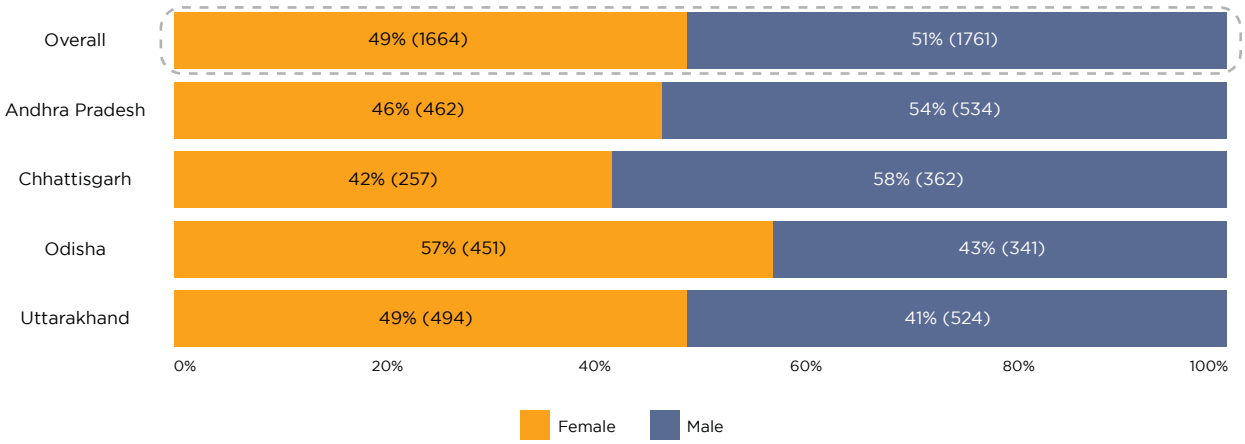
When the responses were divided by application category, the OBC category formed the highest proportion, with 37% of the total responses, followed by EWS at 35% and SC at 20%

Figure 3: Composition of total completed surveys by application category



With regard to gender, at the overall level, 51% of the responses were from parents/caregivers of male students while 49% were from parents/caregivers of female students. However, there were variations within states, especially in Chhattisgarh (58% male; 42% female) and Odisha (43% male; 57% female).

Figure 4: Composition of total completed surveys per state by gender



Descriptive Statistics

The survey results analysis is segmented into two cohorts, corresponding to the 2021–22 cohort—a longitudinal analysis with students who got enrolled under RTE 12(1)(c) in 2021—and the 2023–24 cohort—with students who got enrolled in 2023. In this section of the report, we examine a broad range of indicators: response rates, application process, retention rates amongst cohorts (including switches to other schools and dropouts), the perception of discrimination faced by students and reported by their parents or caregivers, and the targeting under RTE 12(1)(c).

By combining operational indicators with deeper insights into student and family experiences, this section aims to provide a better understanding of both the implementation and the on-ground effect of the policy.
The table details the proportion of different states that are surveyed, the breakdown of gender ratios and the different application categories.

Category of Analysis	State/ Gender/ Application Category	Retention Survey '25	Retention Survey '24	Retention Survey '23
States	Chhattisgarh	617 (53%)	1643 (65%)	2220(61%)
	Odisha	139 (12%)	148 (6%)	390(11%)
	Uttarakhand	414 (36%)	748 (29%)	1021(28%)

Gender	Female	514 (44%)	1081 (43%)	1551(43%)
	Male	656 (56%)	1458 (57%)	2080(57%)
Application Category	EWS/BPL	369 (33%)	618 (25%)	836(23%)
	CWSN	1 (0.09%)	4 (0%)	5(0%)
	OBC	453 (39%)	945 (39%)	1347(37%)
	SC	216 (18%)	561 (23%)	821(23%)
	ST	82 (7%)	305 (13%)	462(13%)
	Other	3(0.3%)	-	-

Table 2: Demographics comparison for cohort 2021–22 —2025, 2024 & 2023 survey round

Note: EWS/BPL: Economically Weaker Sections / Below Poverty Line; CWSN: Children With Special Needs; OBC: Other Backward Classes; SC: Scheduled Castes; ST: Scheduled Tribes

Based on the above table, we see the composition of the respondents according to State, Gender and Application Category, for the 2021–22 cohort in the 2023, 2024 versus 2025 iterations of the survey. Given these figures, an important limitation to note is the attrition in the survey respondents and the retention rates across the years are representative of the varying respondents' composition over the years.[6]

[6] The same sample of students from the 2021-22 cohort was surveyed in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 survey round, however due to attrition the composition varies and the subsequent survey present a subset of the original sample.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Results and Analysis

1. Application Process

In order to access the benefits of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, parents or caregivers must actively apply for their child's admission through a formal application process. While this analysis does not capture the experiences of families who might have been unable to apply due to challenges with the application process itself, it provides valuable insights into the functioning of the process for those who did. Hence, understanding how this process unfolds for those who managed to apply is essential to ensure that this critical first step is inclusive, accessible, and equitable. By examining the modes through which families become aware of the programme and fill the application, as well as how difficult they feel the process is, we can begin to assess the accessibility and reach of information that enables participation.

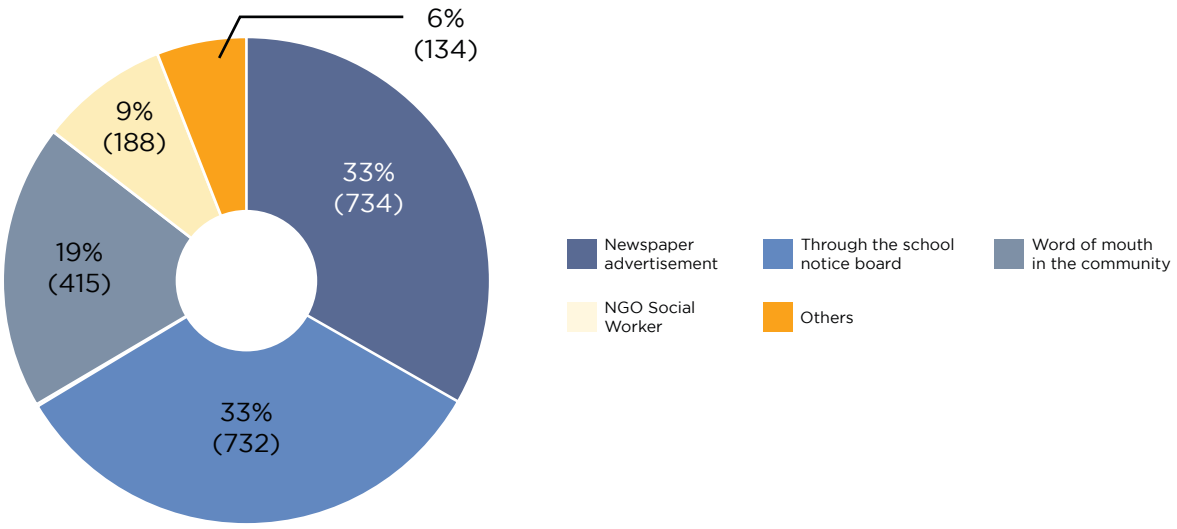
An Overview: Application Process

This section highlights key findings regarding the application process.

- Mode of awareness: Majority of the respondents mentioned newspaper advertisements (33%) and school notice boards (33%) as sources of information and awareness regarding the RTE 12(1)(c) application process.
- Mode of filling the form: 45% of the respondents mentioned going to cyber cafes (including Sewa Kendras) to fill out the application forms while 38% claimed to have filled the application by themselves.

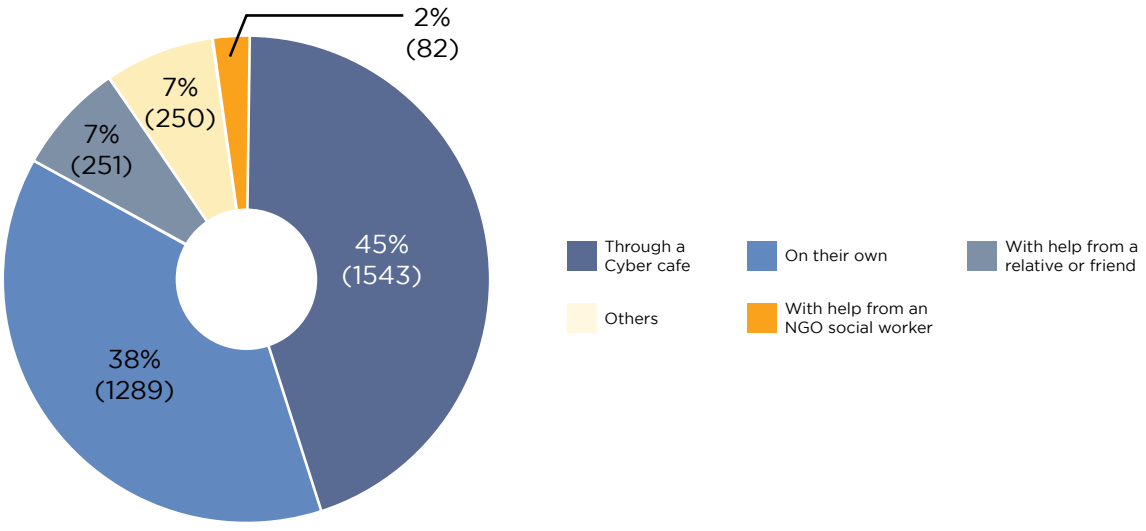
In terms of the different modes of awareness regarding the RTE process, a majority of the respondents mentioned newspaper advertisements (33%) and school notice boards (33%) as their main sources of awareness and information.

Figure 5: Mode of awareness regarding application process under RTE 12(1)(c)



Further, we observe that the respondents had different methods of filling out the applications. Around 45% of the respondents mentioned going to cyber cafes to fill out the application forms. Here, it is important to note that the cyber cafe category also includes the 'Sewa Kendras' or the physical help centres set up by various state governments that provide assistance with applying for various services. 38% of the respondents mentioned filling the application by themselves. However, we would like to mention that filling the application 'through a cyber cafe' and 'on their own' are not mutually exclusive and thus the numbers should not be taken at face value alone, but instead provide an estimate of the actual trends in terms of the modes of filling the application utilised by the respondents.

Figure 6: Mode of filling the RTE 12(1)(c) application



We also explored how difficult the respondents felt the entire process was. Out of the respondents who completed the survey, almost a quarter of the respondents (approximately 23%) found the process of applying for admissions under RTE to be between 'somewhat challenging' to 'quite challenging' (Appendix I). We also found that this number is disproportionately high for Chhattisgarh, with 46% of the respondents finding it 'somewhat challenging' and another 6% finding it 'quite challenging' or 'very challenging'.

However, we believe it is important to reiterate here that the data in this entire section only reflects individuals who were able to complete the entire application process. It is possible that those who faced greater difficulties may not have been able to finish, or even begin, the process, and thus are not represented in this analysis. Romero and Singh (2022) further suggest that barriers to applying under RTE 12(1)(c) such the low information about the policy along with the complexity of the application process in itself might actually have a role to play in the successful applicants disproportionately representing the more-educated and economically better-off households within the eligible groups.

2. Retention Analysis

Retention of students admitted under RTE 12(1)(c) is a critical marker of both policy efficacy and the impact on students' experiences. For the purpose of this survey, retention under RTE 12(1)(c) indicates that disadvantaged children not only gain access to private schools but also continue to benefit from remaining in the same private school, under RTE 12(1)(c), over time. Conversely, when students leave the schools they were admitted to —whether through switching schools or dropping out—it can signal additional costs for families, administrative bottlenecks, or mismatches between family needs and what schools offer. Therefore, monitoring retention is key not only to assessing policy success but also to understanding the experiences families have under RTE 12(1)(c) and identifying areas for improvement.

An Overview: Retention Analysis[1]

Retention measures how many students continue in RTE 12(1)(c) schools over time. This section highlights key findings across cohorts, gender, states, and student categories.

- Overall Retention: 93% of students stayed in RTE 12(1)(c) schools, with <1% dropping out. The main reasons for switching to non-RTE schools include affordability, administrative issues (e.g., enrolment problems, documentation, lack of information), and distance from school. Disaggregated trends reveal meaningful differences.

[1] As in all other sections, we include for analysis all surveys in which respondents completed the minimum threshold, considering the criteria to consider a survey 'completed'. As explained in the 'Response Rate' section, the criteria considers the responses in which the respondent has successfully answered this 'Respondent Still on Call' question at the end of the first three sections.limitation in the sample size.

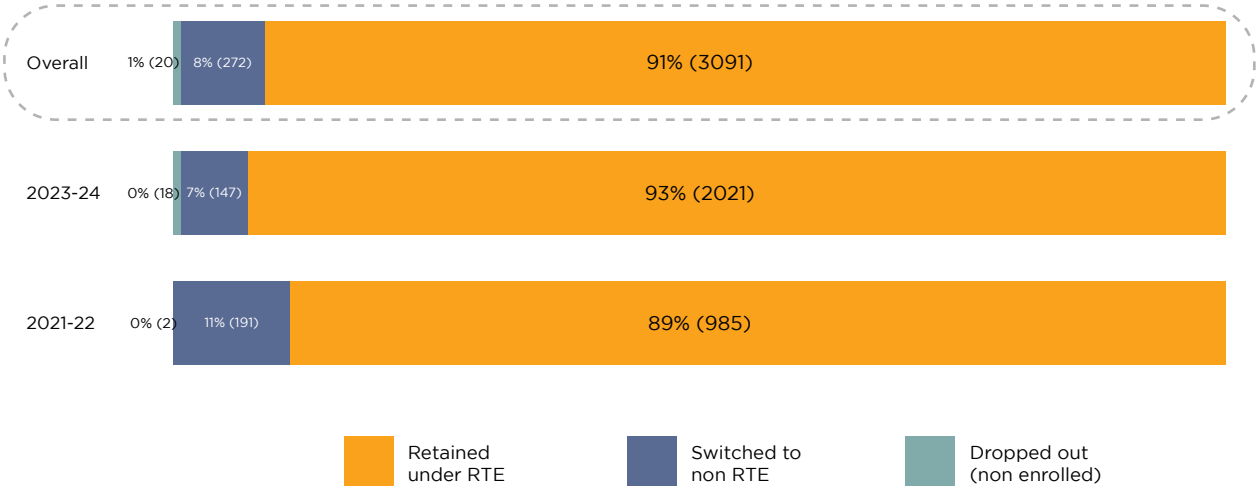
- By cohort, there are significant differences:
  - For 2023–24 Cohort: 93% retained, 7% switched, <1% dropped out.
  - For 2021–22 Cohort: 89% retained 3 years after admission.
- By Gender: Girls consistently show higher retention than boys.
  - In 2023–24 cohort, 94% of girls stayed in RTE 12(1)(c) schools, compared to 91% boys.
  - In the 2021–22 cohort, the gap widened: 95% of girls vs. 84% of boys.
  - Boys are three times more likely to switch schools (15% vs. 5%), often moving to private or nearby government schools.
- State-level differences are striking:
  - Uttarakhand: consistently 99% of retention, state with highest retention rate. Odisha also has consistent rates around 97-98% (however, with the higher dropout rates).
  - Chhattisgarh (retention of 80%) and Andhra Pradesh (86%) have the lowest retention rates. Chhattisgarh due mostly to administrative hurdles and distance and Andhra Pradesh, because of affordability issues.
- By Category, we see EWS with 97% retention and ST with 96%—the higher retention rates as compared to OBC (90%), SC (87%).

Overall Patterns and Cohort Trajectories

We are analysing retention for both cohorts: 2023–24 and 2021–22. We consider that a student is 'retained' either if they are currently enrolled in the same school as indicated in the state government's RTE 12(1)(c) records, or if they are currently studying in another school (different than the one listed in the state government's records)[7] under the same RTE 12(1)(c) provision. Thus, if a student went to another school but not under RTE 12(1)(c), we consider that the student 'switched'. A student is considered to be a 'dropout' when the respondent says that they are not enrolled in any school. Figure 2.1 below shows the rates for each cohort and an overall retention rate, which includes the full survey sample.

[7] While such discrepancy is rare, but it is possible in cases where parents have requested a school change with RTE 12(1)(c) provision while the database we have access to may show the school originally allotted to the child.

Figure 7: Retention Rates by Cohorts



As we can see in Figure 2.1, the 2023–24 cohort shows a 93% retention, meaning that over nine in ten students are still enrolled in RTE-allotted schools. Last year's survey (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024) also showed a similar retention rate of 93% for the previous cohort (2022–23). In this year's sample, 7% switched to a non-RTE school, while we had 18 dropouts—representing less than 1% of the total sample.

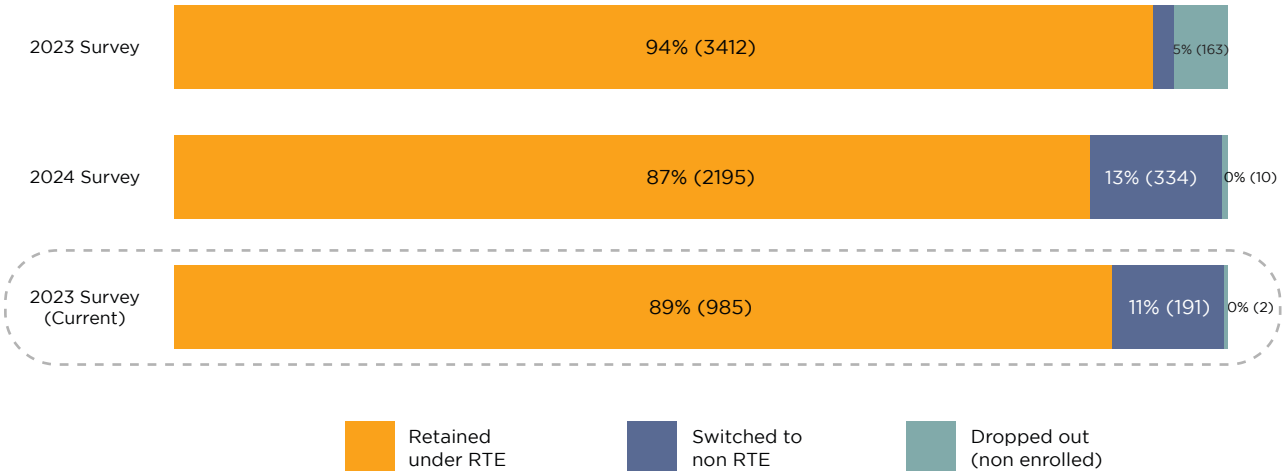
For the 2021–22 cohort, this survey represents the third year of longitudinal monitoring. It is interesting to compare this cohort's retention rates over the past three years, as Figure 2.2 shows. For the 2021–22 cohort, longitudinal tracking reveals stability in retention between year 2 (2024 Survey) and year 3 (2025 Survey, i.e. this one). While we observe a slight uptick in switching in the second survey, the majority of students (nearly nine in ten) continue under RTE support even after three years. The panel also shows that in the first year this cohort had 5% of dropouts, which is not the trend we observe in the subsequent surveys. There are two hypotheses for this, and they can coexist:

i) Although this is a longitudinal study, i.e. the 2021–22 cohort, tracks students at the individual level, attrition and differences across survey rounds may reflect changes in the composition of respondents due to selective non-response. The survey used the same sample of students across 3 rounds, however it is likely that in the 2024 and 2025 surveys, a subset, potentially biased toward those who remained enrolled—responded.

In particular, parents/caregivers of students who switched schools early may have been less likely to answer follow-up surveys, introducing a form of attrition bias. and/or

ii) Dropouts could be momentary, i.e. students having dropped out for some particular reason (considering the cohort entered school during the COVID year) and being captured in the 2023 survey, but getting re-enrolled to a school before the next round of the survey and hence being represented in a switched or retained category (depending on whether or not they got re-enrolled under an RTE-allotted school);

Figure 8: Retention Rates for 2021-22 cohort



Retention by Gender

The study observes a difference in retention by gender, with girls being more likely to stay in the same school under RTE, and boys being more likely to switch, as we see in Figure 2.3 which shows the whole sample.

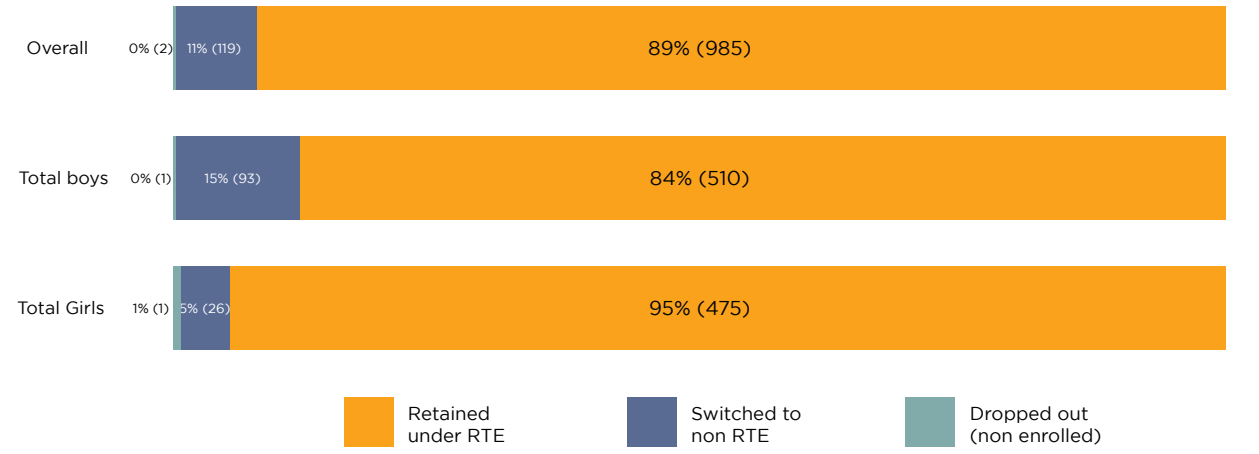
Figure 9: Retention Rates by Gender (All Cohorts)

As we can see in Figure 2.4, for the 2023–24 cohort, girls and boys show different retention rates, but the difference is not that significant: 94% of girls were retained as compared to 91% for boys. Switching and dropout behaviors are likewise parallel, but we see 9% of boys switching as compared to 5% for girls.

Figure 10: Retention Rates by Gender (Cohort 2023-24)

As shown in Figure 2.5, for the 2021–22 cohort, by the third year of the survey, a gender divergence is shown: we observe girls having a 95% retention rate, whereas boys have an 84% retention rate. In last year's survey, the numbers were 93% and 82% respectively (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024). Furthermore, similar to last year, the switching rate among boys is higher than girls (15% as compared to girls' 5%) which could potentially suggest that over time, families are more likely to reevaluate school fit for boys as compared to girls.

Figure 11: Retention Rates by Gender (Cohort 2021-22)



These patterns highlight the need for gender-sensitive follow-up, particularly for boys, to understand the specific factors prompting their migration away from RTE-allotted schools.

Retention by State

The state-level analysis varies by cohort, since different states are represented in each. For the 2021–22 cohort, the sample includes respondents from Uttarakhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. For the 2023–24 cohort, we have respondents from Uttarakhand, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. Figure 2.6 and Figure 2.7 below show the retention rates by state for each cohort.

Figure 12: Retention Rates by State (Cohort 2023-24)

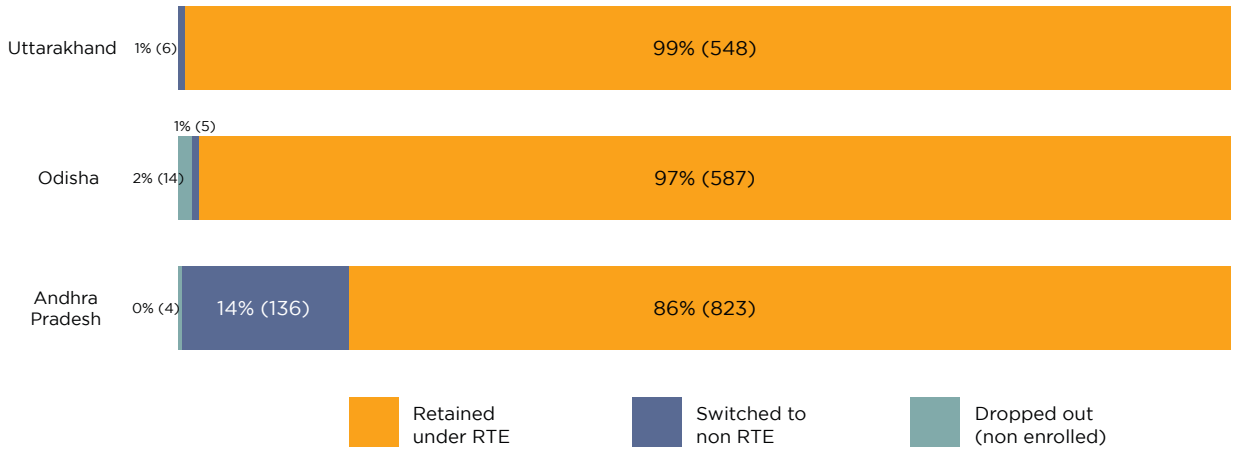
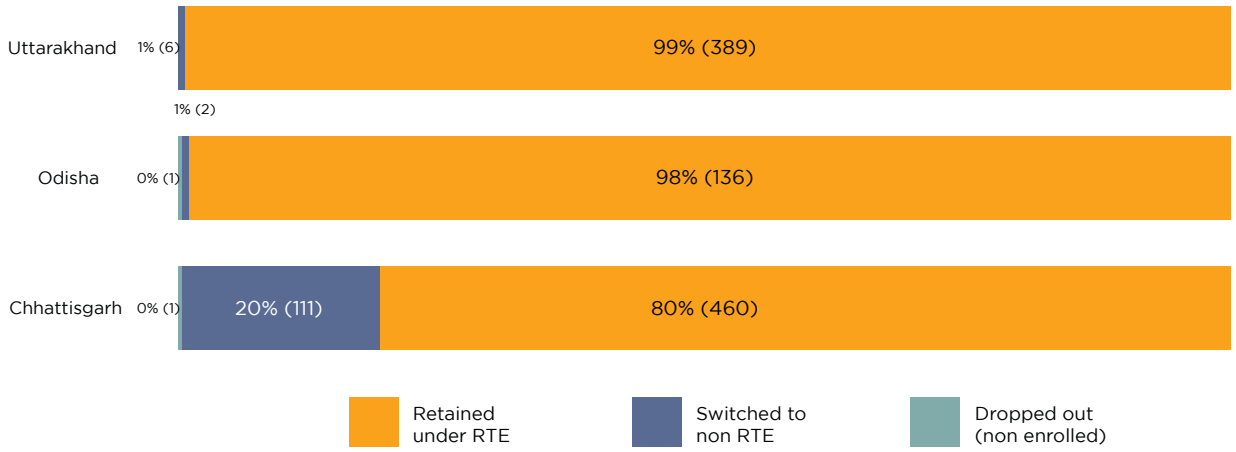


Figure 13: Retention Rates by State (Cohort 2021-22)



For the 2023–24 cohort, Uttarakhand indicates a high retention rate of 99%, reflecting that the policy is not only well-implemented but also appears to be firmly institutionalised in the state. In last year's survey, Uttarakhand already showed strong results, with a 96% retention rate for the 2022–23 cohort (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024).

Odisha shows a retention rate of 97%, also improving from the previous year's 94%. However, it is notable that 2% of students dropped out—although a small share, it is the highest dropout rate among all states in both cohorts.

Andhra Pradesh, which participated in the Retention Survey for the first time in 2025, presents a retention rate of 86%, notably lower than the other states in this cohort. As discussed later in this section, this result appears to be tied to specific affordability barriers.

For the 2021–22 cohort, Chhattisgarh records the lowest retention among all the states at 80%, dropping from 83% in last year's survey (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024). This downward trend highlights persistent implementation challenges that we will explore in more detail in the following subsections.

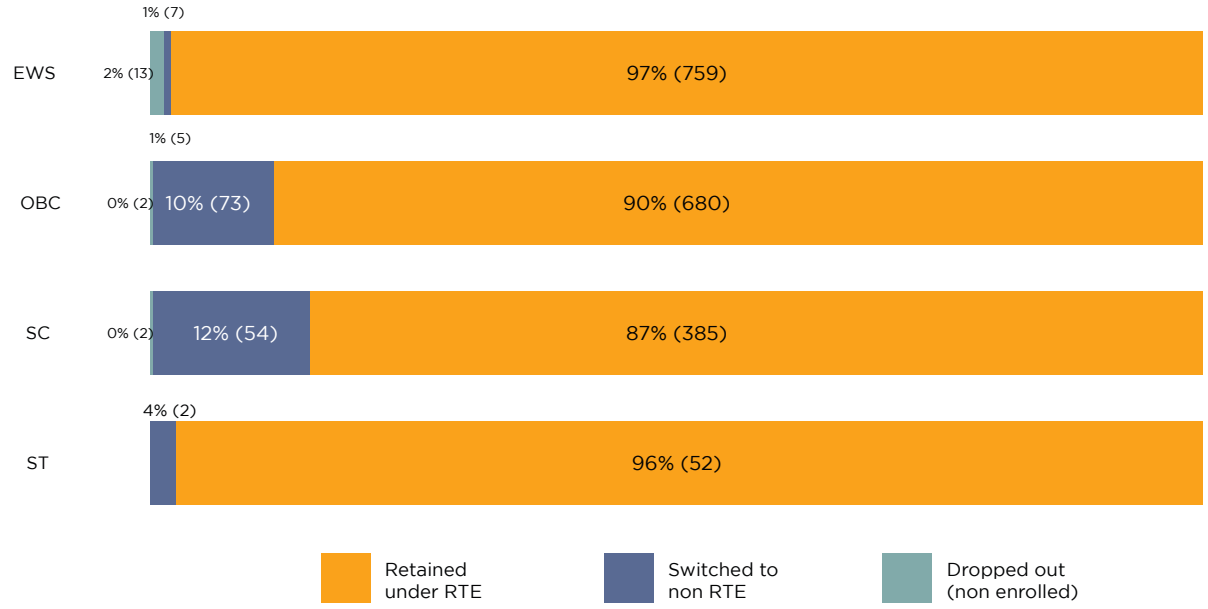
In contrast, Uttarakhand again shows the highest retention for this cohort - at 99%, compared to 95% in the 2024 survey. This consistent performance across time and cohorts positions the state as a potential model for best practices.

Odisha also demonstrates improvement for the 2021–22 cohort, with a retention rate of 98%, up from 93% in the previous survey. Dropout rates in this cohort are negligible - less than 1% - and do not appear to be a significant concern.

Retention by Application Category

Retention patterns also vary across application categories, reflecting how different social and economic groups experience the policy. Different application categories capture distinct social and economic groups, each facing unique barriers to sustained enrolment. Students from the EWS group have shown higher levels of retention as compared to OBC and SC students. While in terms of % ST group shows higher retention the sample size of ST students is significantly smaller than that of other groups in the sample.

Figure 14: Retention Rates by Category (Cohort 2023-24)

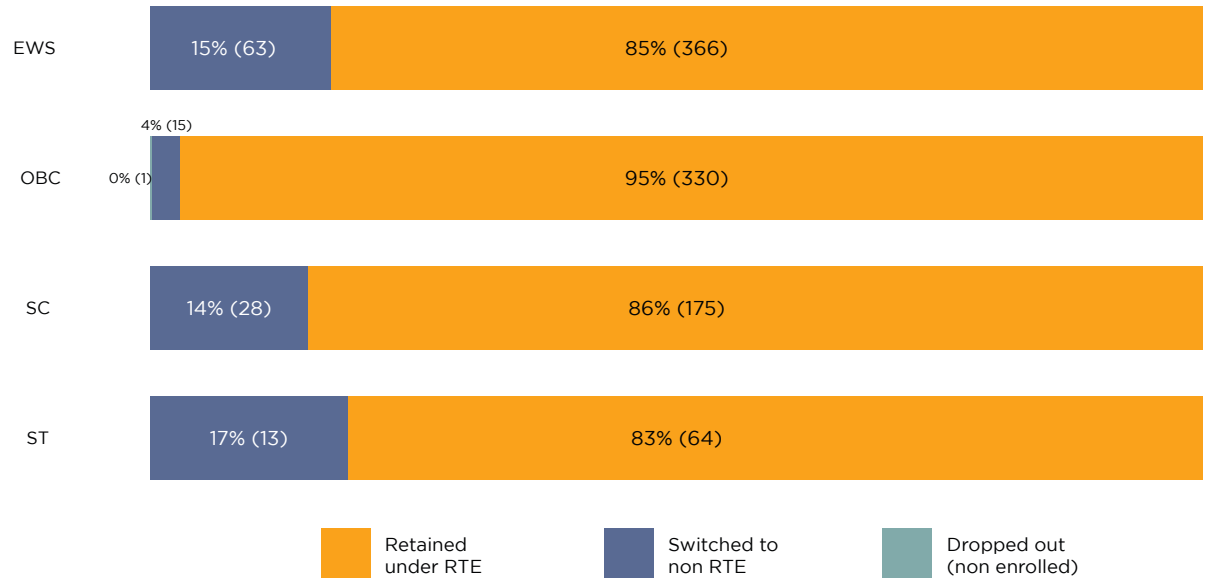


As we can see in Figure 2.8, for the 2023–24 cohort, EWS students demonstrate the highest retention rate, with 97% continuing in RTE-allotted schools, 1% switching, and 2% dropping out.

The higher retention of EWS families indicates that they face fewer barriers to education than other socially disadvantaged groups.
OBC students show a retention rate of 90%, with 10% switching. SC students' retention is at 87%, with a slightly higher switch rate of 12%. Notably, ST students reach a retention rate of 96%, which is substantially higher than what has been observed in previous surveys—a meaningful and encouraging shift.

When comparing these results to the previous survey's results (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024), which covered the 2022–23 cohort, both EWS and ST show increased retention (up from 93% and 86%, respectively). This improvement is particularly significant for ST students. On the other hand, OBC and SC groups now show lower retention compared to last year's survey which showed 91% retention rates for OBC and 94% for SC (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024), with the decline among SC students being especially notable.

Figure 15: Retention Rates by Category (Cohort 2021-22)



For the 2021–22 cohort, we observe a similar pattern, as we can see in Figure 2.9. EWS students again lead in retention rates, with 95% retained and 4% switching. OBC retention is slightly lower at 85%, and SC follows closely with 86%. ST students show a retention rate at 83%, the lowest among the categories for this cohort.

All categories improved their retention when compared to the same cohort in the previous survey round. In that wave, EWS retention was 90%, while ST had only 78%—showing a notable upward trend across the board, especially for ST students (Indus Action & Georgetown University, 2024).

Hence, while EWS students show consistently higher retention, the lower rates among SC and ST groups, particularly in earlier waves, underscore possible ongoing equity challenges. These disparities suggest that, beyond financial access, policy efforts must include tailored support at the school level for the most marginalised groups.

Moving to a non-RTE-allotted school – Reasons for Switching

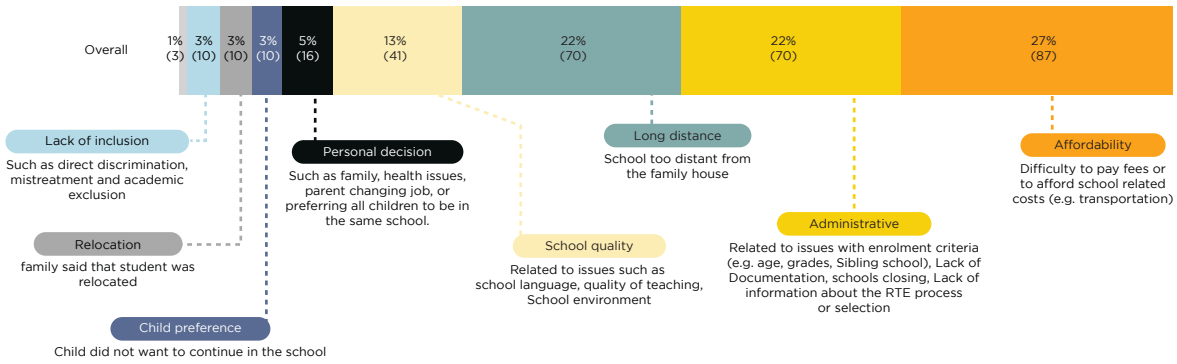
Families who leave RTE 12(1)(c) -allotted schools cite a range of reasons, reflecting both structural challenges and personal circumstances. It is important to highlight that Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh are the states with the majority of switching case[8]. In the survey, responses were grouped into eight broad categories:

[8] Over 90% of the school switching cases are from Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

- Affordability: Difficulties in covering school-related costs, including transport, uniforms, or extra fees - even when tuition is waived.
- Administrative Issues: Problems related to enrolment eligibility, school closure, lack of documentation for enrolment or confusion, misunderstandings about the RTE process.
- Quality of Education: Dissatisfaction with teaching standards, language of instruction, or the overall school environment.
- Distance: Long or unsafe commutes between school and home.
- Personal Decision: Family or health issues, parental job changes, or preference to consolidate children in the same school.
- Child Preference: The child explicitly did not want to remain at the RTE-allotted school.
- Relocation: Family moved to a different area.
- Lack of Inclusion: Experiences of direct discrimination, mistreatment, or academic exclusion.

As shown in Figure 2.10, affordability emerges as the most frequently cited reason for switching, accounting for 27% of responses overall. This is followed by administrative hurdles (22%), quality of education (22%), and distance (13%). The remaining reasons—personal decision, child preference, relocation, and lack of inclusion—each account for under 10% of responses. While affordability dominates at the aggregate level, the relative importance of each reason shifts across cohorts, demographics, and regions.

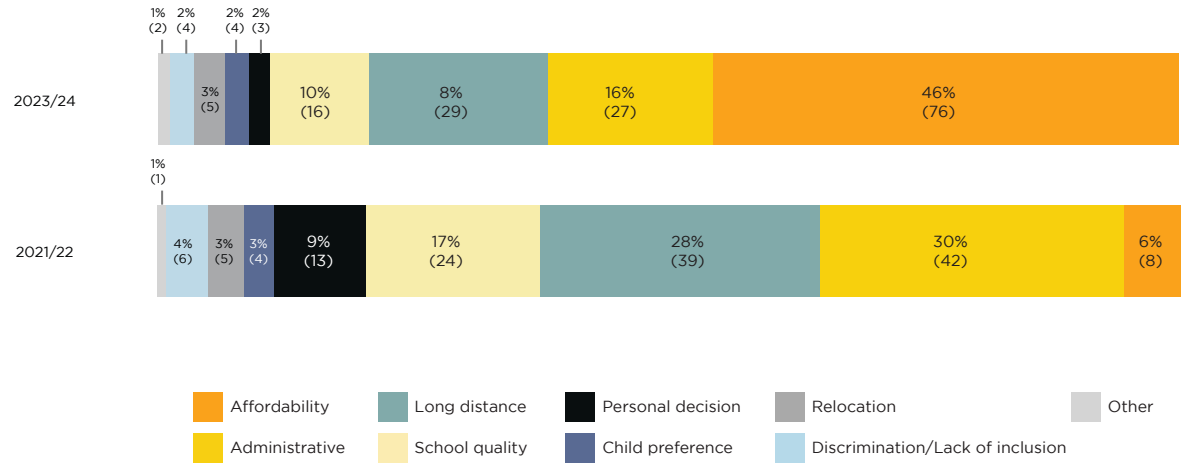
Figure 16: Reasons for Switching



By Cohort

The prominent reasons for switching change over time. For the 2023–24 cohort, affordability is by far the leading driver, cited as the reason by 46% of families who switched to other[9] schools. In contrast, for the 2021–22 cohort, affordability plays a smaller role (6%). For this cohort, 30% of the respondents mentioned administrative issues, such as documentation issues, school closure, and misinformation about RTE, and distance (28%) as the reason for switching schools. This shift indicates that structural and logistical concerns become more salient as families spend more time navigating the school system. The difference in reasons between cohorts may also be influenced by the specific states represented in each. Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh—each comprising one cohort—present distinct dominant reasons for switching, which we further explore in the following subsections.

Figure 17: Reasons for Switching (By Cohort)



By State

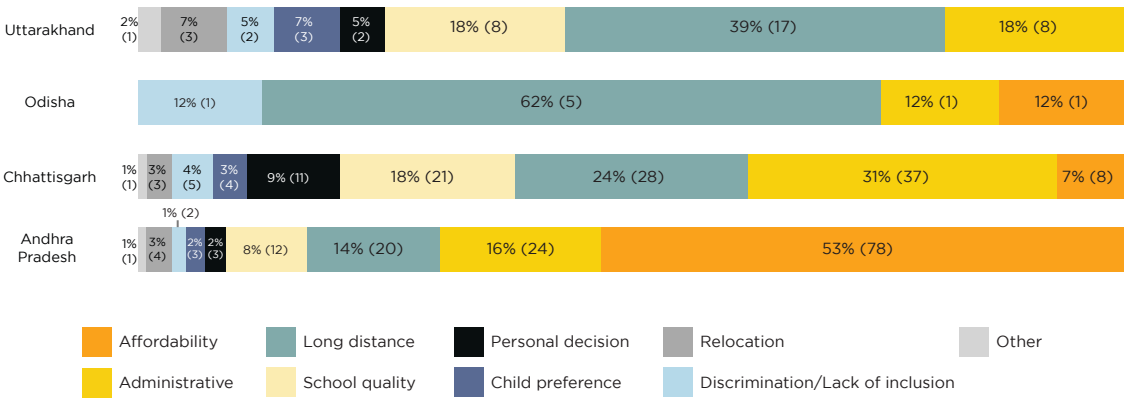
Regional differences are striking and often reflect the composition of each state's sample. In Chhattisgarh, where the vast majority of students switching are from the 2021–22 cohort, 31% mentioned administrative hurdles—such as documentation issues, school closure, and misinterpretation about RTE 12(1)(c) implementation—while 24% mentioned distance, leading them to be the top reasons, highlighting systemic challenges over time. In contrast, in Andhra Pradesh, with all 2023–24 respondents, affordability (53%) clearly dominates.[10] This finding is reflective of on-ground implementation of the finding, since the majority of the students who switch are doing so for the same reason.

[9] Other schools here refers to the school other than the one allotted under the RTE 12(1)(c).

[10] In Andhra Pradesh as per the state notification dated 26-02-2023 "The reimbursement amount of per child expenditure to the school will be done by the parent from the amount they receive under the AmmaVodi scheme at the end of the academic year." However, based on discussions with parents during the survey, it was evident that they had not understood that they would be required to make such reimbursements to schools.

how the policy is designed and implemented across states—especially given the affordability challenges observed in Andhra Pradesh.

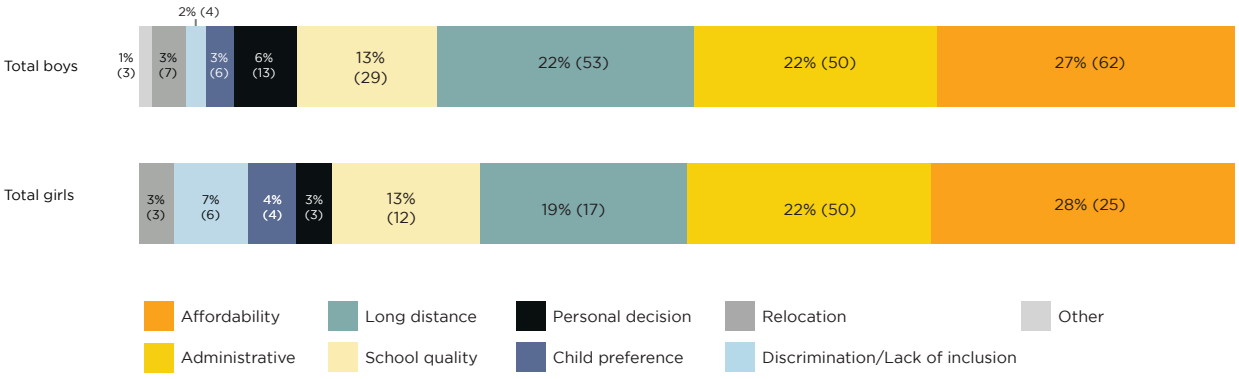
Figure 18: Reasons for Switching (By State)



By Gender

Reasons for switching are broadly similar between boys and girls, but some differences stand out. Only 2% of boys mention discrimination or exclusion as the reason, compared to 7% of girls, signalling a potentially gendered experience of school environments.

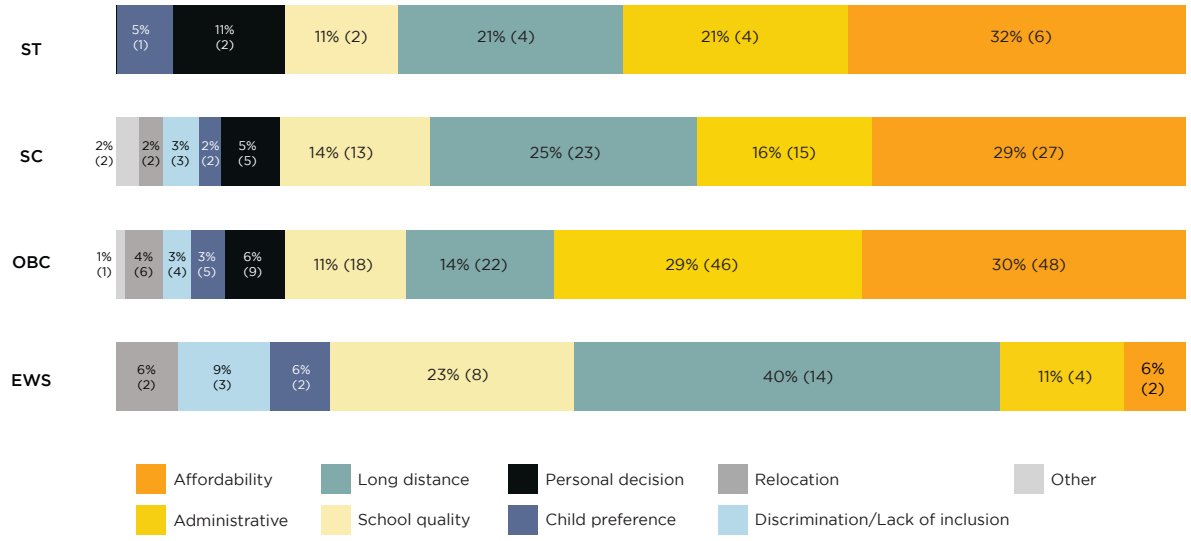
Figure 19: Reasons for Switching (By Gender)



By Application Category

Switching motivations also vary by application category. EWS students, who have the highest retention, rarely cite affordability as a reason for switching. Instead, they are more likely to report distance and quality of education. In contrast, all other DG are disproportionately affected by affordability barriers, followed by distance or administrative issues.

Figure 20: Reasons for Switching (By Category)



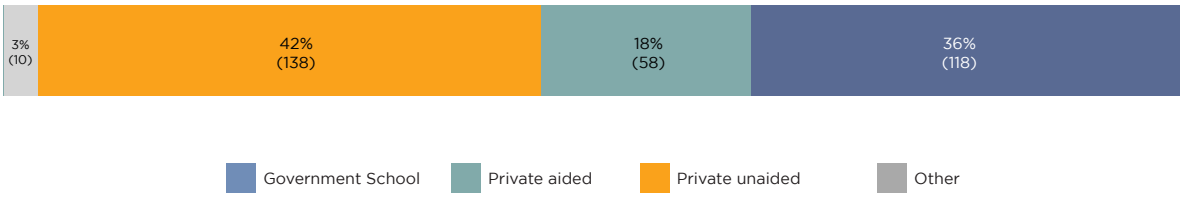
Moving to a non-RTE-allotted school – Destination schools after switching.

When students exit RTE-allotted schools, they tend to move toward three main types of institutions, each reflecting different motivations and constraints. As shown in Figure 2.15, those who switch away from RTE-enrolled schools fragment into the following pathways:

- Government Schools: Chosen by 36% of families, the schools offer free education (and mid-day meals) and are often closer to home, making them an appealing option for families prioritising affordability and convenience.
- Private Aided Schools: Account for 18% of switches. These schools may offer partial subsidies or reputational advantages, attracting families looking for a balance between cost and perceived quality.
- Private Unaided Schools: The largest share—42% of switchers—opt for fee paying private schools, indicating that some families are willing to invest in what they perceive as higher-quality education, despite already being allotted an RTE 12(1)(c) seat in another private unaided school. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, where affordability is identified as the primary reason for changing schools, discussions with parents suggest that many parents have chosen more affordable private unaided schools.

The preference for government schools highlights affordability concerns, especially for families struggling to cover additional schooling expenses under RTE 12(1)(c). Meanwhile, movement toward private, aided schools suggests a calculated search proximity of the school or quality without fully abandoning financial caution. The strong flow into private unaided schools demonstrates that, for a subset of families, perceived educational quality outweighs cost concerns.

Figure 21: Type of School Enrolled in after Switching



By Cohort

The 2023–24 cohort shows that 40% of switchers moved to private unaided schools, slightly lower than the 45% observed in the 2021–22 cohort (Appendix II). In both cohorts, a relevant share also transitions into government schools, reaffirming the role of cost in early decision-making.

By Gender

Gendered patterns emerge in school choices when switching from an RTE-allotted school (Appendix II). Boys are more likely to transition into private unaided schools (45%), while girls more frequently enrol in government schools (48%, compared to 31% of boys). This suggests families' preferential educational spending for boys and may consider proximity and safety as higher priorities for girls, which government schools may potentially offer.

By State

Patterns for destination schools vary sharply by state, particularly in Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, which account for most of the switching cases (Appendix II). In Chhattisgarh, students who switch are split evenly between private unaided (45%) and government schools (45%), indicating divergent family strategies within the same region. In Andhra Pradesh, the distribution is more fragmented, but 40% of students switching opt for private unaided schools, showing continued demand for private schooling even when cost was cited as a barrier. This apparent contradiction may be explained by the government scheme (Ammavodi), which provided Direct Benefit Transfers to mothers as financial assistance for children's education. At the time of application, many families may not have had full or timely information about how the scheme would work in practice. In fact, the guidelines linking the reimbursement process to Amma Vodi were notified a year after the start of the implementation of the programme. Thus, a few field interactions indicate that

parents (and in some instances schools) believed the education to be free causing confusion and lack of enforcement. Thus, when being asked to pay the reimbursement amount or, in some cases the full school fees, parents might have switched to more affordable private schools. Additionally, there may have been some parents who did not receive the Amma Vodi DBT and thereby were unable to pay the required amount, leading them to switch to more affordable schools.

By Application Category

Trends also differ across application categories. ST and SC students switch more often into government schools, pointing to possible sustained affordability constraints (Appendix II). In contrast, OBC students are more represented among those switching to private unaided schools, suggesting greater financial flexibility or different school preferences.

These insights on school destinations post-switching reinforce the complexity of household decision-making and underline that cost, perceived quality, safety, and convenience all interact to shape which schools parents/caregivers choose after a student leaves their RTE 12(1)(c) allotted school.

Dropout Analysis

Dropout remains a rare outcome across both cohorts, indicating that even when families leave RTE 12(1)(c) provision, they rarely abandon schooling altogether. Nonetheless, the fact that a child is no longer enrolled in any school is a serious concern and warrants close attention from both policymakers and implementers. These cases of dropouts, though few, signal situations where access to education has been interrupted, even if only for a short period.

While the overall dropout rate is under 1%, the concentration of cases in specific locations and groups reveals meaningful patterns, as can be seen in Table 3 below. Out of 19 total dropouts recorded in the sample, 15 occurred in Odisha alone, with 14 of these attributed to the long distance between school and home. This points to a potential mismatch between school allocation and household geography, or affordable/free modes of transportation, highlighting a possible need for review and strengthening RTE's allocation mechanisms in the state to prevent such outcomes. The dropout cases in Odisha are also demographically concentrated: 11 were girls, and 14 belonged to the EWS category.

Outside Odisha, dropout cases are minimal. In Andhra Pradesh, three students dropped out: two boys from the OBC category and one girl from the SC category. In Chhattisgarh, a single case of dropout was reported—a boy, with no additional category information available.

While these numbers are low, they underscore the importance of preventive monitoring and localised responses, especially in states or communities where logistical barriers like distance lead to dropouts. Based on local grievances, the Government of Odisha has started the process of transfer of students within the RTE 12(1)(c) framework (to other schools with vacancies) in cases where the schools have been closed or families relocate, which may lead to dropouts in the short term. This measure provides the opportunity for children to continue to access education under the said provision, despite changes in personal or external circumstances. This measure will potentially minimise dropouts in the coming years.

Reason	Andhra pradesh	Chhattisgarh	Odisha	Total
Long distance			14	14
Personal issue	1	1		2
Administrative	1			1
Child faced difficulty in studying			1	1
Could not afford education	1			1
Total	3	1	15	19

Table 3: Reasons for dropouts (By State)

3. School-related Expenditure

RTE 12(1)(c) mandates private schools to provide free education for students enrolled under the RTE Act. Hence, parents should not have to pay any school fees or even school-related ancillary fees (details of different fees paid in Appendix III). However, as per the survey responses, the on-ground reality is that a large number of parents/caregivers have to pay different types of fees. The reason for this might be due to differences in policy between states, delays in reimbursements to schools by the government, school fee being higher than the per-child reimbursement rate, amongst others.

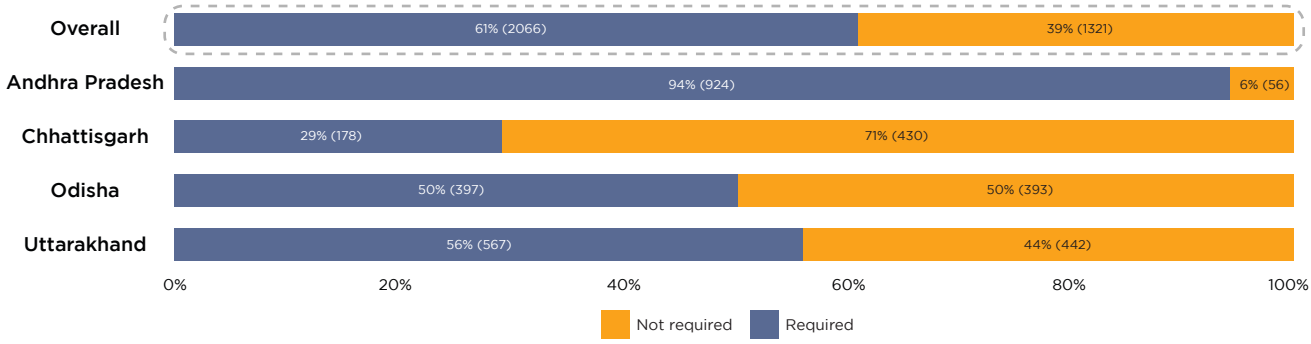
An Overview: School-related Expenditure

This section highlights key findings regarding the school-related expenditure and the difficulty faced in paying it by parents/caregivers.

- Requirement to pay fees: 61% of the total respondents mentioned paying school-related fees; however, we observed state-level variations due to differences in policies
- Difficulty in paying fees: 57% of the respondents found paying the required fees quite difficult or very difficult

Figure 22 below shows that 61% of the total respondents had to pay some level of school-related fees. However, Andhra Pradesh was a clear outlier, with 94% of the respondents having to pay fees—this is primarily due to the implementation process in the state. While the state notification mentions that parents would need to pay school fees as per the state-notified per-child cost to the schools through the Amma Vodi DBT, many parents and schools in some instances were not aware of this process and/or the fee amounts they would need to pay to schools.

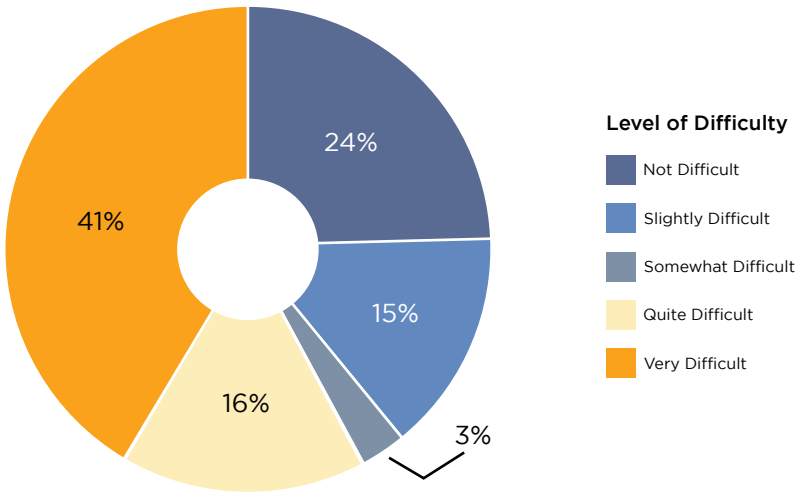
Figure 22: Requirement to pay school fees or school-related fees



However, even if we take into account the other states, with the exception of Chhattisgarh, a majority of the respondents seem to be paying some level of fees—something that undermines one of the key motivations behind the 12(1)(c) provision, i.e. providing access to quality education for children belonging to low-income families.

Figure 23 below substantiates this claim, showing that approximately 57% of the respondents required to pay school-related fees reported that covering these costs is either 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult'. Among the 94% of respondents from Andhra Pradesh who are required to pay fees, 96% reported that paying these fees is either 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult'.

Figure 23: Level of difficulty in paying school-related fees



4. Perception of Discrimination

The RTE 12(1)(c) provision aims to improve access to education for students from EWS and DG backgrounds by providing school choice and enabling inclusion in schools for all children. Given the diverse fabric of the Indian context, students who belong to marginalised groups have a significantly different schooling experience. These differences may result in challenges related to social integration and acceptance within the school. The Indus Action Retention Survey 2025 aims to explore these dynamics more deeply, focusing on how well students admitted under RTE 12(1)(c) are integrated into private schools, which include students from different backgrounds.

This module of the survey asks the parents or caregivers about their perception of inclusion in schools environment through interactions with other peers, teacher or with regards to the overall school enviornment. A key caveat to keep in mind is that the data collected through this survey can only be used to shed light on the respondents' perception of inclusion, and does not give us an objective measurement of social inclusion in schools.

An Overview: Perception of Discrimination

This section highlights key findings regarding the school-related expenditure and the difficulty faced in paying it by parents/caregivers.

- 98% of parents reported a positive or very positive overall experience in schools, and 90% said their child enjoys school.
- Peer interaction: 87% parents perceived that children are treated equally by peers however, of the 13% that reported that the child is treated differently by their peers majority of them are girls.
- 56% of respondents reported that there are 'rich' students present in their child's school; 9% said the child is not friends with them.
- Teacher interaction: 91% parents or caregivers said teachers pay attention to their child; with 70% saying that attention is equal or more than peers.
- 12% of respondents believe that their child is overlooked for opportunities in school events; in Odisha, this figure rises to 47%.
- More girls(19% of girls) than boys(6.7% of boys) report being treated differently by peers.

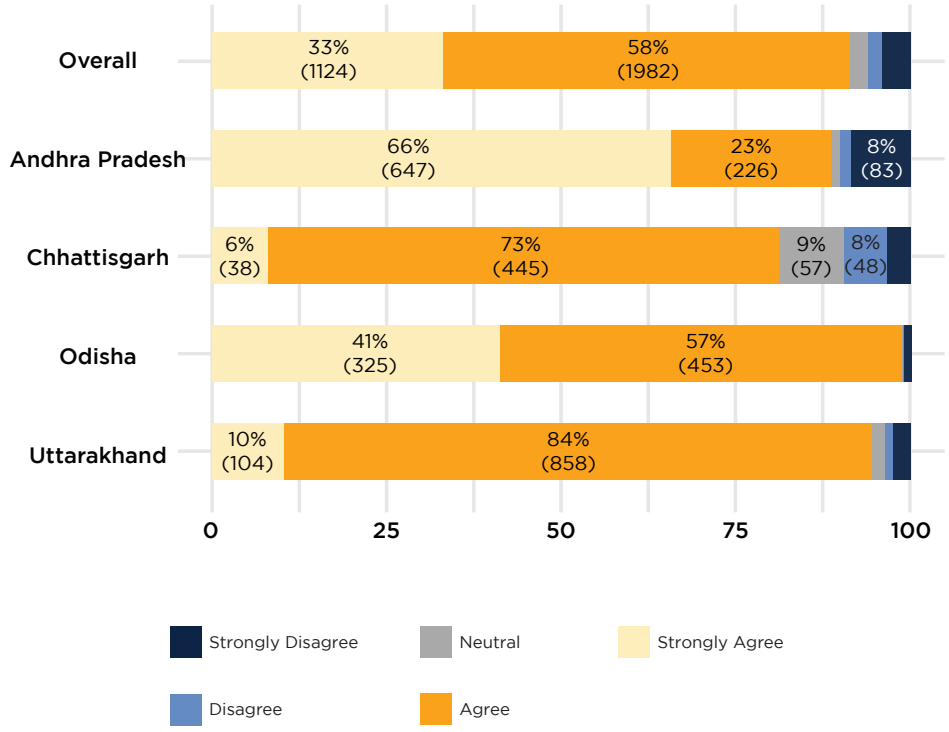
Schooling experience of children

Private schools in India, especially those under the purview of RTE 12(1)(c), encompass students from diverse socio-economic classes and caste identities. Students who are accepted into the school through RTE 12(1)(c) may face difficulties in integrating with their classmates who are from more affluent families.

To better understand these social dynamics, the survey includes questions that capture parents' perceptions of their child's experience with peers, teachers, and the overall schooling experience. These questions are a subtle way of understanding patterns of inclusion or exclusion that affect students' social integration.

In the overall sample, 90% of the respondents agree that their child enjoys being in school. This perception holds across gender, with 89% of girls' and 92% of boys' parents report that their child enjoys school.

Figure 24: Child's Enjoys school- By State

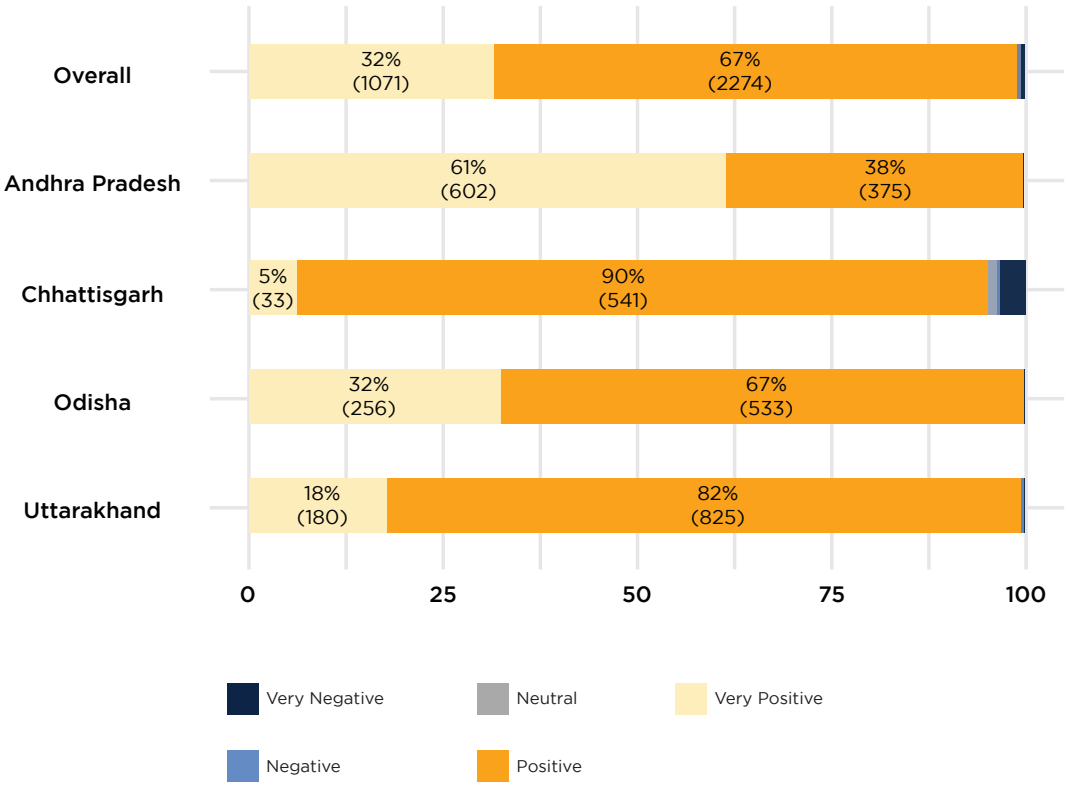


We also analyse whether other students are chosen over their child for school-related opportunities (Appendix IV), such as participation in annual days or sports days. In the whole sample, 87% of the respondents believed that their child included in school level opportunities. However, this varies by gender wherein 16% parents of girls feel that their child is overlooked for opportunities as compared to 10% boys. State level analysis reveals, Odisha presents an outlier, as 48% of the respondents believe that their child is overlooked by teachers for opportunities in the school.

Experiences with Peers

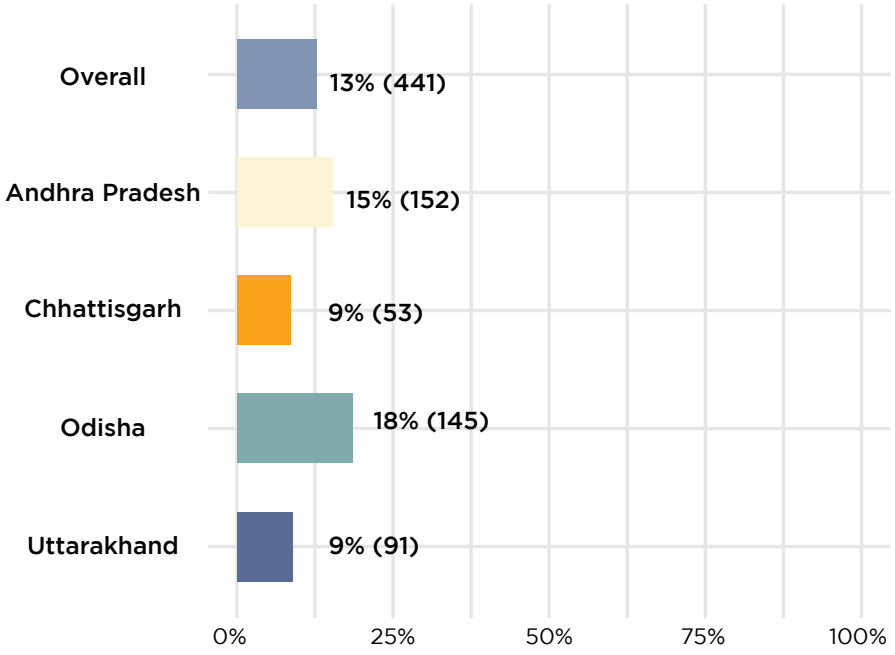
When asked about their child's overall experience at school with peers, 98% of parents described it as positive or very positive (98% for girls and 97% for boys). Among the few parents who reported negative experiences (19 in total), the most cited reason was that the child would get into fights with their friends.

Figure 25: Child's Overall Experience with peers - By State



In addition, we also tried to gauge whether students feel that their classmates treat them differently from other peers. Only 13% of students in the sample have experienced this different treatment; among them, 73% are girls. Further state-wise analysis shows that 15% of students in Andhra Pradesh and 18% in Odisha report being treated differently compared to 9% of students in Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, respectively.

Figure 26: Children treated differently by peers- By State



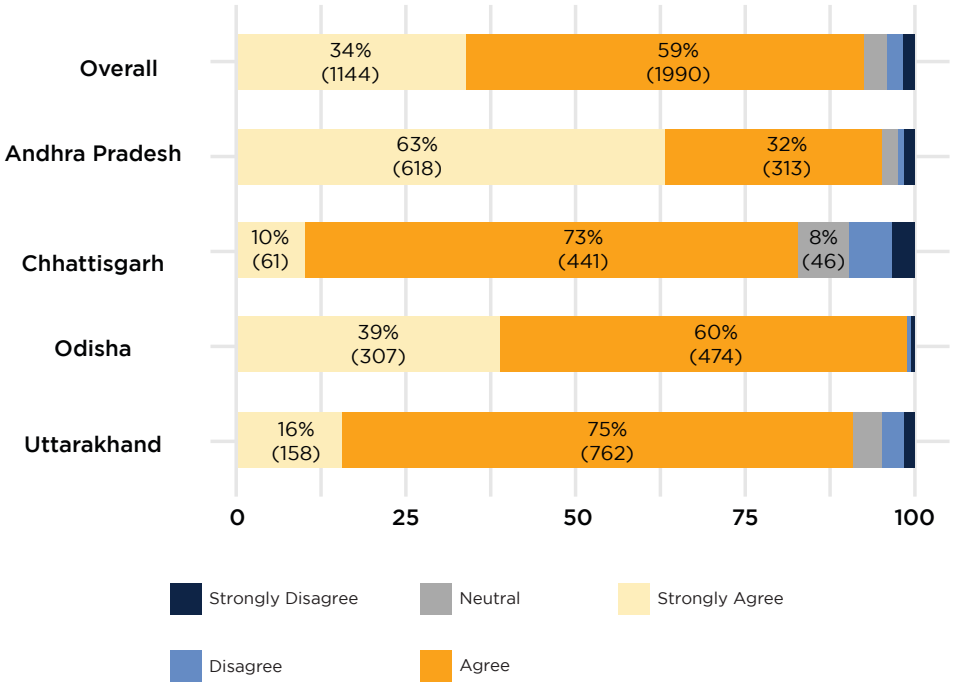
We also assess whether their child's school includes students from wealthier families, and whether their child is friends with those students. 56% of the respondents believe that there are 'rich' students in the same class as their child, and, among them, only about 9% answered that their child is not friends with these students. When looking at each state, we see that 11% of the respondents in Uttarakhand and 19% of the respondents in Andhra Pradesh believe that their child is not friends with these rich students.

Experiences with Teachers

An important dimension of understanding students' inclusion within schools is studying the role of teachers in a child's academic life. Teacher engagement can influence how a child admitted under RTE feels more included, and the survey asks questions to assess the extent of teacher involvement from the perspective of the parent or caregiver.

We assessed whether teachers pay attention to the child's performance, and 91% of the respondents reported that they do. This was consistent across boys and girls, indicating that there is no gender disparity in how much attention the teacher pays.

Figure 27: Teacher Pays Attention to the Student - By State



Parents are also asked how frequently they interact with the teacher (Appendix IV), with the most common response being 'every 2-3 months' (35%). However, within the study, this seemingly lower frequency does not reflect a lack of effort on the part of the teachers but rather may point to the time constraints that parents/caregivers from low-income families can face in engaging with teachers.

Further inspecting teachers' direct involvement with the child (Appendix IV), we see that 70% of the respondents reported that their child receives equal or more attention from teachers compared to other students. State-level variations reveal that in Odisha, only 50% of the respondents felt their child was equally or more attended to by teachers, suggesting a potentially more negative experience in this regard.

5. Targeting under RTE 12(1)(c)

The Right to Education Act is an affirmative action programme, and there is a concern of effective targeting so that the most vulnerable in the population are able to access the programme. In a 2022 study conducted in Chhattisgarh, it was found that more educated and wealthier families dominate the applications under RTE 12(1)(c), with only 7.4% of programme funds reaching the poorest quintile versus 24.3% to the richest (Romero & Singh, 2022). The Retention Survey examines parents/caregivers perceptions and behaviors related to the affordability of private schooling in India, while also evaluating the effectiveness of the Act's current targeting system.

An Overview: Targeting [1]

This section highlights key findings regarding the targeting of RTE provision 12(1)(c).

- The 2025 Retention Survey evaluates targeting effectiveness through:
  - Perception of Affordability
  - Siblings in Private Schools
  - Asset Index Analysis
- When parents/caregivers were asked if they could afford private education without RTE support:
  - Overall, 40% said they could afford private schooling without RTE 12(1)(c).
  - At the State level, 83% in Odisha report affordability without the RTE provision; only 12% in Andhra Pradesh report affordability.
  - When respondents were asked asked if RTE-enrolled children had siblings in private schools and whether those siblings are also admitted under the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.
  - 39% reported having at least one child in private school without using RTE 12(1)(c), suggesting partial affordability.
  - At the State level, 9% in Andhra Pradesh report siblings attending private schools without the RTE 12(1)(c) provision; whereas, 59% in Odisha report the same.
- An Asset Index was created using PCA (Principal Component Analysis). Respondents were divided into quintiles based on asset scores.
  - 39% reported having at least one child in private school without using RTE 12(1)(c), suggesting partial affordability.
  - At the State level, 9% in Andhra Pradesh report siblings attending private schools without the RTE 12(1)(c) provision; whereas, 59% in Odisha report the same.

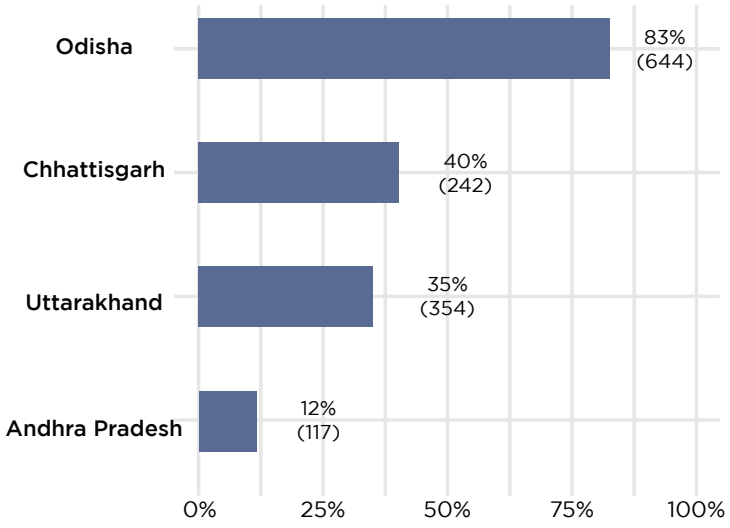
In this survey, we evaluate targeting primarily through three mechanisms:

- **Perception of Affordability:** Parents/caregivers were directly asked if they could afford private school education for their child in the absence of support under RTE Section 12(1)(c), to understand how parents/caregivers view their own ability to sustain this kind of education.
- **Siblings in Private Schools:** One of the questions in the survey explores whether the child has any siblings currently enrolled in private schools through the RTE12(1)(c) provision. This serves as a proxy to estimate the share of households in our sample that can afford private education for at least one child without relying on the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.
- **Asset Index Analysis:** Drawing on the methodology from Romero and Singh (2022), we constructed an asset index using collected asset ownership data. This index enables comparative analysis across different socio-economic groups within the sample.

Perception of Affordability

When parents or caregivers are asked whether they will be able to afford private education without the RTE act, we assess the proportion of 'Yes' responses within the sample. In the overall sample, about 40% of the respondents said that they would be able to afford private education without access to provision 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act. When looking at the state-wise breakdown, we see that 83% of the respondents in Odisha report being able to afford private education, compared to only 12% of the respondents in Andhra Pradesh.

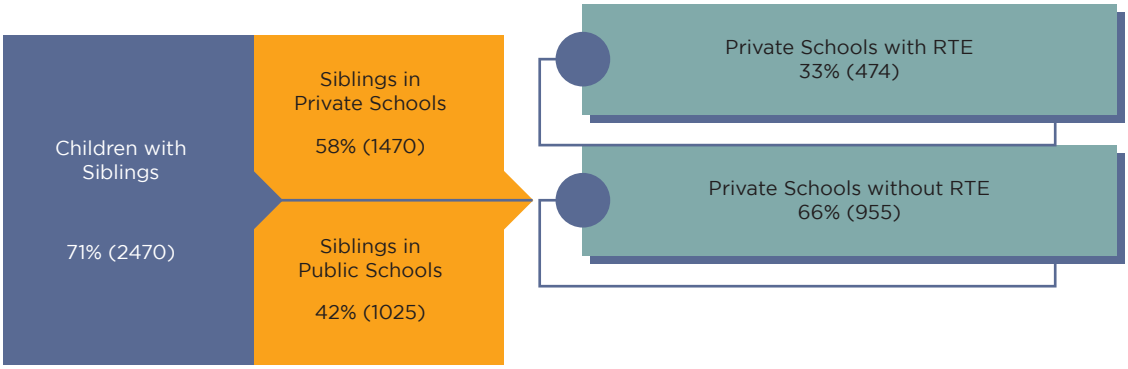
Figure 28: Perception of Affordability - By State



Siblings in Private Schools

This section of the survey is based on three key questions—whether the student enrolled under RTE has a sibling, whether that sibling is attending a private school, and whether that sibling is enrolled under RTE. This helps us break down the sample and understand parents'/caregivers' choices of schooling for different children in the household. The figure below presents the number of respondents within each of these three categories, and based on this breakdown, we find that 39% of the respondents in the sample are parents who are able to afford private schooling for at least one child without relying on the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.

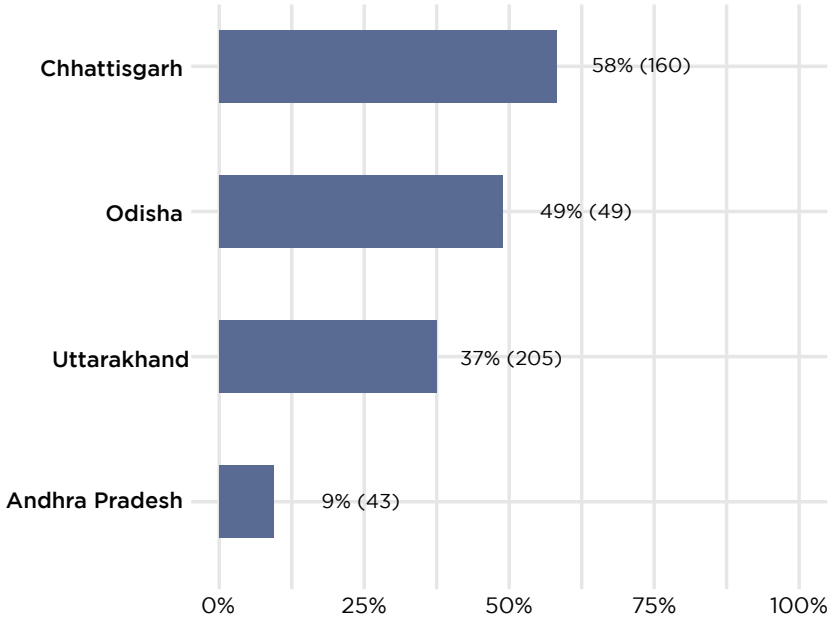
Figure 29: Siblings in Private School



The state-wise analysis shows us that only 9% of the respondents in Andhra Pradesh have at least one other child enrolled in private school without the support of RTE 12(1)(c), whereas in Odisha this accounts for 59%. This suggests better targeting of the provision in Andhra Pradesh as respondents from Andhra Pradesh have a greater need for provisions under RTE 12(1)(c).

As we conduct further analysis here, it is important to note that the RTE 12(1)(c) provision is structured in such a way that enrolment can be accepted only at entry grade level. Evidence from Dongre et al. (2019) suggests that the RTE 12(1)(c) mandate has increased access to private education, but implementation barriers—lack of awareness, insufficient information, complex application procedures—have hindered the saturation of the programme. Hence, parents' sending one child to private school under RTE 12(1)(c) other child to a private school without the provision despite being an 'eligible family' could be due to these reasons. It is possible that an 'eligible family' lacked awareness or complete documentation to apply under the RTE 12(1)(c) provision for their older child previously, but has since acquired both the necessary awareness and documentation to apply.

Figure 30: Siblings in Private School - By State



Asset Index Analysis

The asset ownership questions in the Retention Survey 2025 follows the structure of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data. The initial aim of the analysis was to directly compare asset index scores across the NFHS data and our dataset, following the methodology from Singh and Romero (2022). However, due to lack of access to the NFHS dataset we could not carry out the comparison as planned. In lieu of the comparison with the NFHS data, we are instead using the asset index to gauge whether targeting has been effective for the EWS category under RTE 12(1)(c). Table 4 shows the proportion of asset ownership across the overall sample (which includes all the categories of application within RTE 12(1)(c)) and the EWS category. The asset index analysis is primarily used to assess whether the Act is successfully reaching children from the most economically disadvantaged households.

Table 4: Comparison of Asset Ownership in the Sample

Variable	Overall Percentage	EWS Percentage
Electricity Connection	97	
Television	69	74
Refrigerator	30	25
Car	3	5
Two wheeler	59	71
Table	48	71
Chair	69	81
Toilet	91	95
House	71	86
Smart phone	86	95

The above asset ownership data is collected as binary variables and made into an asset index distribution using the PCA method. When we assess the perception of affordability by asset quintiles, we note that 58% of the respondents in the top quintile feel that they can afford private schooling without RTE, compared to 20% in the bottom quintile. This pattern follows the expected income distribution trends, where wealthier households are more likely to perceive private schooling as affordable.

The question about siblings enrolled in private schools without RTE 12(1)(c) support shows a counter-intuitive result, when we analyse it by the asset quintiles. Among households in the lowest asset quintile, 47% reported that other children are enrolled in private schools without RTE 12(1)(c). In contrast, this figure stands at 29% for those in the highest asset quintile. A similar trend emerges at the state-wise level for Andhra Pradesh, with 31% in the bottom quintile and 3% in the top quintile sending their children to private schools without RTE 12(1)(c). Additionally in Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, we see the same pattern, although it is less pronounced, with only a 5-6 percentage point difference between the bottom and top asset quintiles (Appendix V).

Further to identify the right targeting this study also conducted an analysis of the sample based on three indicators:
i) Top quintile of the asset ownership,
ii) Siblings who are going to school without the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, and
iii) Those who can afford to pay the school fee without the RTE 12(1)(c) provision. (perception of affordability)

Using these three indicators we find the intersection of these three variables is only true for 0.92% of our sample, suggesting that 99% of the sample would have found it difficult to pay school fee in the absence of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.

STATE SUMMARIES

State Summaries

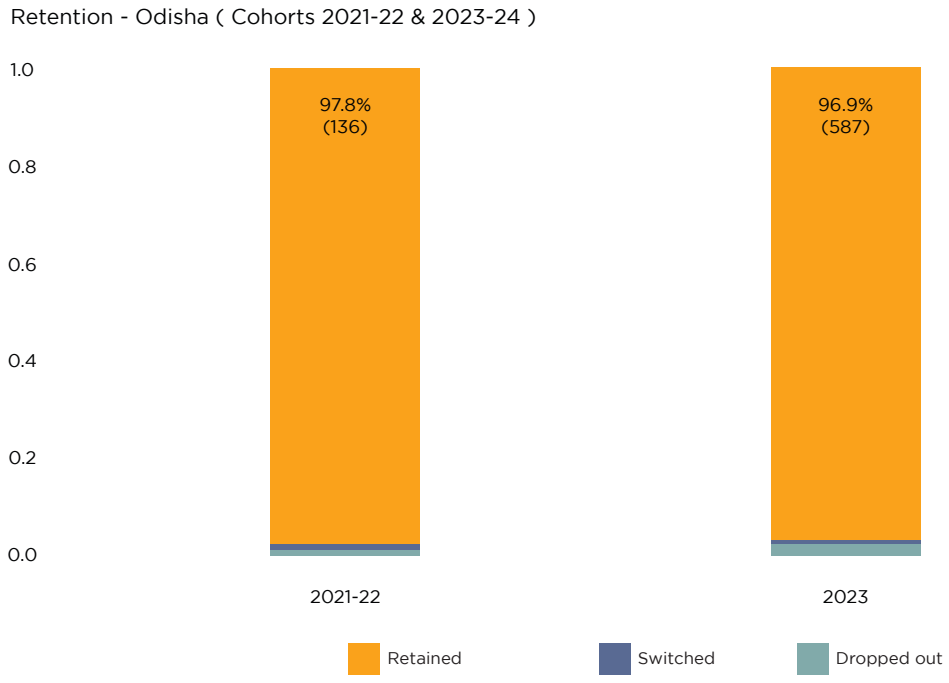
Odisha

In Odisha, the retention survey is conducted for two cohorts 2021-22 and 2023-24. The survey is completed for 792 students accounting for 23% of total completed surveys, with a slight gender imbalance favouring female respondents (57% female, 43% male) and a significant presence of SC-category families, reflecting state demographics. Response rates were slightly impacted by technical issues like Do Not Disturb settings and switched-off numbers.

Highlights

- Retention: Odisha demonstrates a 97% retention rate.
- For the 2021–22 cohort, retention was 98%.[11]
- Despite this positive trend, Odisha recorded the highest dropout rate among all states, with 2% of the 2023–24 cohort dropping out.
- Of the 19 total dropouts across the survey, 15 occurred in Odisha. 14 dropouts were attributed to long travel distances. Among these, 11 were girls, and most belonged to the EWS category.

Figure 1:



[11] The survey showed a attrition for respondents from 2021-22 cohort and it is likely that those who were not retained are also less likely to have responded to the survey.

Figure 2:

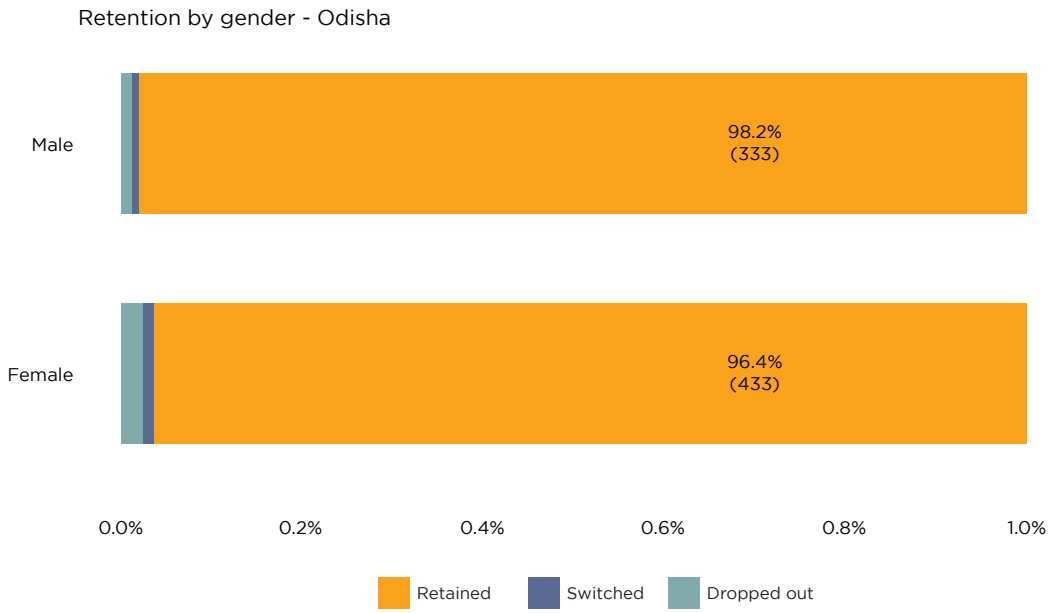
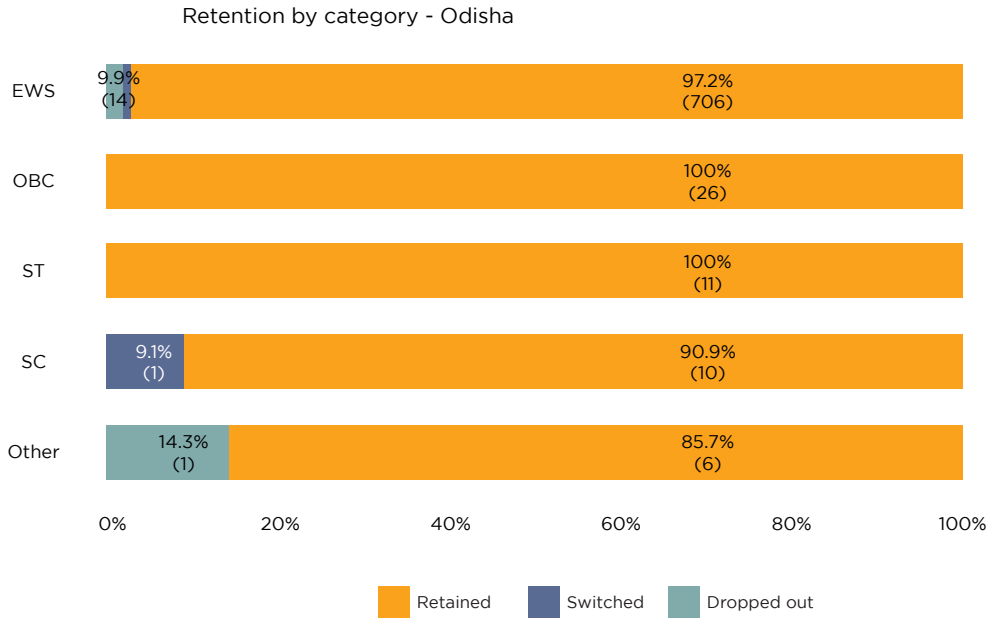


Figure 3:



- **Reasons for switching schools:** There are limited cases of switching schools in Odisha, when it happens, long distance is the primary reason, with families moving mainly to government or private unaided schools, likely balancing cost and quality considerations.

Economic status of students' families & school-related expenditures

- Proxies used for economic status include ability to afford private school, siblings schooling status and Asset ownership of families.
- 83% of the respondents indicated they could afford private schooling without RTE 12(1)(c) support, and 59% reported having another child in private school without RTE 12(1)(c).
- Asset index data further confirm that Odisha's RTE beneficiaries are disproportionately wealthier compared to those in other states. This suggests that the benefits of RTE 12(1)(c) are likely not reaching the most vulnerable.
- 50% of families reported paying some level of school-related fees despite RTE 12(1)(c) mandates for free education. However, among those paying, only 10% found it difficult.

Student's schooling experiences

- **Overall school experience:** The survey asks questions to understand the schooling experience of children. We find that 98% parents agree or strongly agree that their child enjoys being in school. When asked about their perception of whether other children are preferred for opportunities and only 48% of parents believe that other children are given preference. This difference is notably more significant by gender, with more girls than boys feeling that other children are favored for opportunities like sports day or annual day in school.
- **Experiences with peers:** 99% parents in Odisha perceive that children have an overall positive experience with their peers. In addition, to get a nuanced perspective we also tried to gauge whether students feel that their classmates treat them differently from other peers and 18% parents in Odisha report their child is treated differently by peers. We also assess whether their child's school includes students from wealthier families, and whether their child is friends with those students. 95% parents report that their child is friends with richer students in Odisha.
- **Experiences with teachers:** In Odisha we find that 99% parents answer in affirmative that teacher pays attention to their child. To further get nuanced response we ask whether the teacher pays equal or more attention as compared to other students, only 51% parents report that teacher pays either equal or more attention indicating bias. We also gauge parents interaction frequency with the teachers and find that 41% of parents interact with teacher at least once a month or more frequently and 58% parents interact at least once in 2-3 months.

In conclusion, while Odisha shows high level of retention, there is significant reporting of non-inclusive environment in schools including other students being preferred for opportunities and teacher paying less attention to RTE 12(1)(c) students. This indicates that retention and inclusion should be treated as seperate issues and the schools in Odisha should be encouraged and supported to ensure inclusive environment for all students.

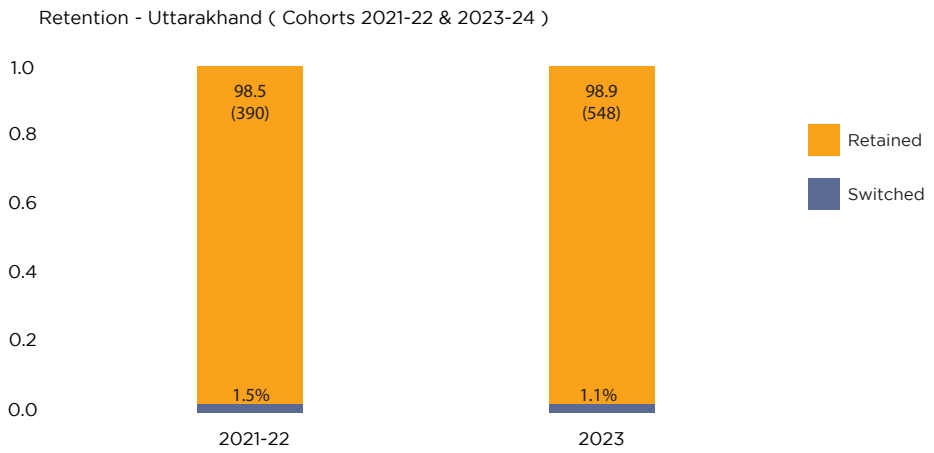
Uttarakhand

In Uttarakhand, the retention survey is conducted for two cohorts 2021-22 and 2023-24. The state shows strong RTE 12(1)(c) implementation across almost all indicators evaluated. The survey is completed for 1018 students accounting for 30% of total completed surveys—the respondent profile shows a balanced gender distribution, with roughly equal representation of male and female students, and a high proportion of respondents from the OBC and EWS categories. Uttarakhand also shows a relatively higher response rate compared to other states.

Highlights

- Retention: Uttarakhand demonstrates the highest retention rate across all states and cohorts surveyed.
- For the 2023–24 cohort, the state recorded a 99% retention rate, reflecting strong and consistent policy implementation. The 2021–22 cohort also shows, 99% retention, improving from 95% the previous year.[12] The stability of retention over time, alongside very low rates of switching and no dropout cases, indicates the policy effectiveness in implementation in the state.

Figure 1: Retention by Cohort (Uttarakhand)



[12] The same sample of students from the 2021-22 cohort was surveyed in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 survey round, however due to attrition the composition varies and the subsequent survey present a subset of the original sample. It is likely that the respondent sample is skewed towards students who are retained in school.

Figure 2: Retention by Gender (Uttarakhand)

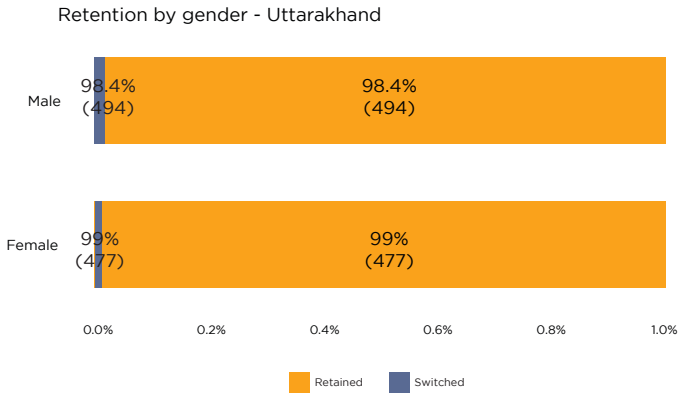
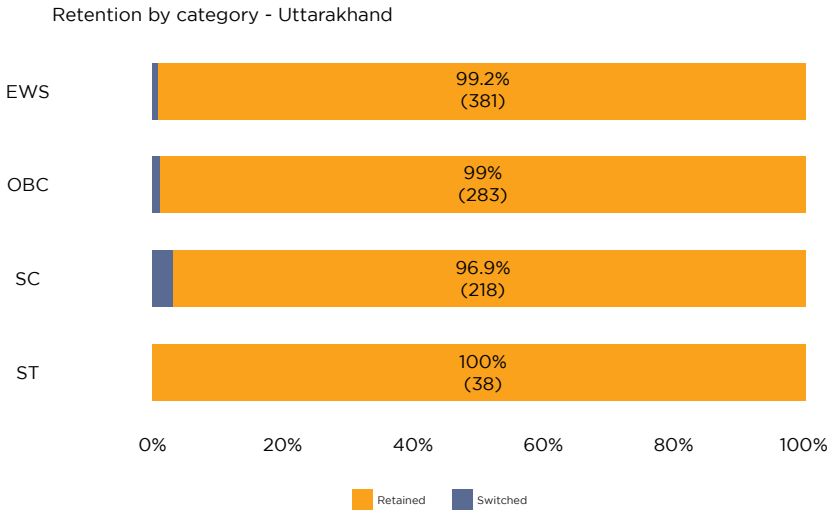


Figure 3: Retention by Category of application (Uttarakhand)



- **Reasons for switching schools:** Although switching schools is rare (1% of the respondents), among those who do switch, the main reason cited is long distance to school (16 students), followed by and school quality concerns, personal reasons or getting admitted to a better school (15), administrative issues such as school closures or demand for fee (4) and relocation of family (4) among other reasons. When switching occurs, families tend to move to either government or private unaided schools, reflecting mixed strategies based on perceived affordability and quality.

Economic status of students' families & school-related expenditures

- Proxies used for economic status include ability to afford private school, siblings schooling status and Asset ownership of families.
- Expenditure patterns reveal, that 56%of respondents reported having to pay some level of school-related fees, contradicting the core objective of free education under the 12(1)(c) provision of the RTE Act.

- 38% of the respondents indicated they would be able to send their child to a private school without RTE 12(1)(c).
- Similarly, 37% reported having another sibling enrolled in private school without RTE 12(1)(c) support.

Student's schooling experiences

- **Overall school experience:** The survey asks questions to understand the schooling experience of children. We find that 94% parents agree or strongly agree that their child enjoys being in school. When asked about their perception of whether other children are preferred for opportunities and only 2.1% of parents reported that they believe other children are given preference. This is a positive indicator, showing that most children feel included in their schools for opportunities such as annual day or sports day.
- **Experiences with peers:** All parents in Uttarakhand perceive that children have an overall positive experience with their peers. In addition, to get a nuanced perspective we also tried to gauge whether students feel that their classmates treat them differently from other peers and 9% parents in Uttarakhand report their child is treated differently by peers. We also assess whether their child's school includes students from wealthier families, and whether their child is friends with those students. 11% parents report that their child is not friends with richer students in Uttarakhand.
- **Experiences with teachers:** In Uttarakhand we find that 91% parents answer in affirmative that teacher pays attention to their child. To further get nuanced response we ask whether the teacher pays equal or more attention as compared to other students, 76% parents report that teacher pays either equal or more attention. We also gauge parents interaction frequency with the teachers and find that 74% of parents interact with teacher at least once a month or more frequently and 25% parents interact at least once in 2-3 months.

In conclusion, Uttarakhand consistently delivers the policy well, indicating highest retention rates across both cohorts surveyed. The state's implementation of RTE 12(1)(c) could serve as a model for other regions for retention as well as inclusion and schooling experiences of children. There however remains scope for improvement with regards to school-related fee charged to parents and ensuring inclusive schooling experience to achieve equitable outcomes.

Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh has been one of the forerunner states in admitting students under RTE 12(1)(c) and in the state the survey is conducted only with the 2021-22 cohort. The state accounted for 619 (16%) of total completed surveys, with a larger share of boys (58% male, 42% female) and a higher presence of SC and OBC groups compared to EWS. Lower response rates likely reflect issues such as relocation, changed or switched off phone numbers, and limited rural mobile connectivity.

Highlights

- Retention: Retention outcomes highlight persistent problems. For the 2021–22 cohort, Chhattisgarh recorded the lowest retention rate among all surveyed states at 80%, down from 83% the year before.
- Switching schools to non-RTE-allotted schools is common (19.7% children have switched school), the reasons for it are reported as 31% of the respondents citing administrative hurdles (including school closures, low quality of education, and demand for fee among others) and 24% citing long distances.
- When switching occurs, families are equally split between private unaided (45%) and government schools (45%), reflecting diverse destination schools. Dropout, however, remains rare, with just one reported case.

Figure 1: Retention by gender (Chhattisgarh)

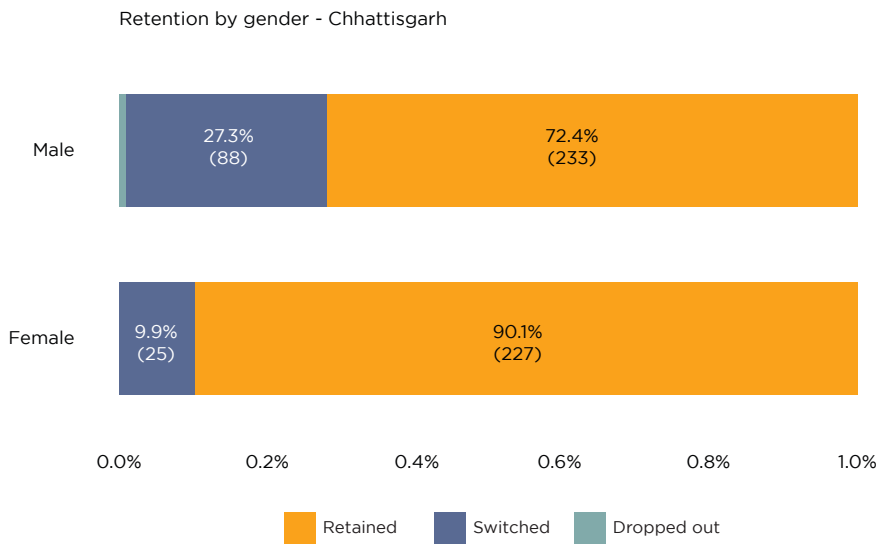
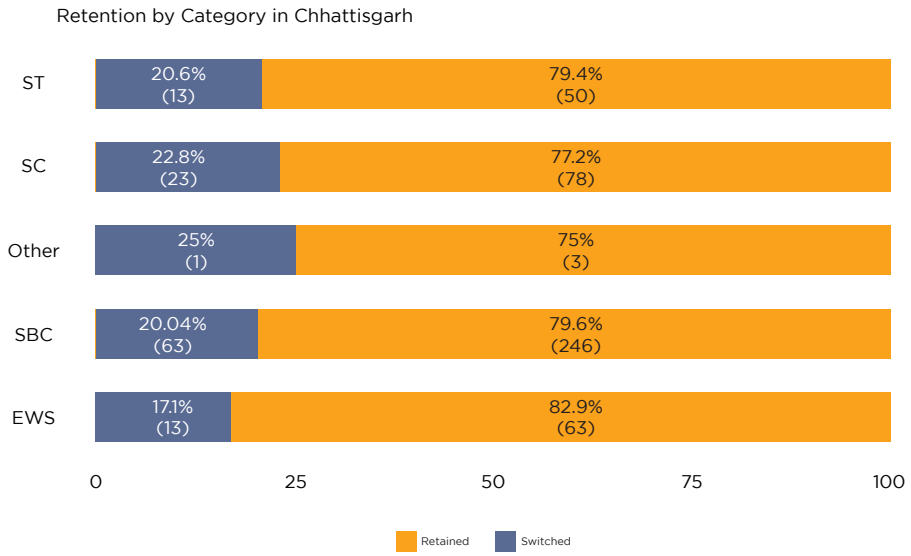


Figure 2: Retention by category of application (Chhattisgarh)



Economic status of students' families & school related expenditures

- Proxies used for economic status include ability to afford private school, siblings schooling status and Asset ownership of families.
- 40% of the respondents believed they could afford private schooling without RTE 12(1)(c) support, and 48% had another child studying in private school outside the RTE 12(1)(c) provision.
- Regarding expenditure, Chhattisgarh stands out positively: it was the only state where most respondents did not pay any school-related fees (around 70%), aligning closely with RTE 12(1)(c) provisions.

Student's schooling experiences

- **Overall school experience:** The survey asks questions to understand the schooling experience of children. We find that 80% parents agree or strongly agree that their child enjoys being in school. When asked about their perception of whether other children are preferred for opportunities and only 4.1% of parents reported that they believe other children are given preference. While this is a positive indicator, showing that most children feel included in their schools for opportunities such as annual day or sports day, however, it is skewed by gender indicating that 6.4% boys and only 0.8% girls feel that other children are preferred.

- **Experiences with peers:** 95% parents in Chhattisgarh perceive that children have an overall positive experience with their peers. In addition, to get a nuanced perspective the survey asks whether children feel that their classmates treat them differently from other peers and 9% parents in Chhattisgarh report their child is treated differently by peers. We also assess whether their child's school includes students from wealthier families, and whether their child is friends with those students. 96% parents report that their child is friends with richer students.

- **Experiences with teachers:** In Chhattisgarh we find that 83% parents answer in affirmative that teacher pays attention to their child. To further get nuanced responses the survey asks whether the teacher pays equal or more attention as compared to other students, 82% parents report that teacher pays either equal or more attention. To understand parent-teacher relationships, the survey asks parent-teacher interaction frequency and finds that 80% of parents interact with teacher at least once a month or more frequently and 16% parents interact at least once in 2-3 months.

In summary, while Chhattisgarh shows better compliance with fee regulations, hoever the state reports low retention and administrative barriers, accessibility issues, and social inclusion gaps. While the state is a fore-runner in RTE implementation, strengthening RTE 12(1)(c) effectiveness in the state will need to address administrative hurdles for parents such as readmission to another school in case the current RTE school shuts down or does not deliver optimal education.

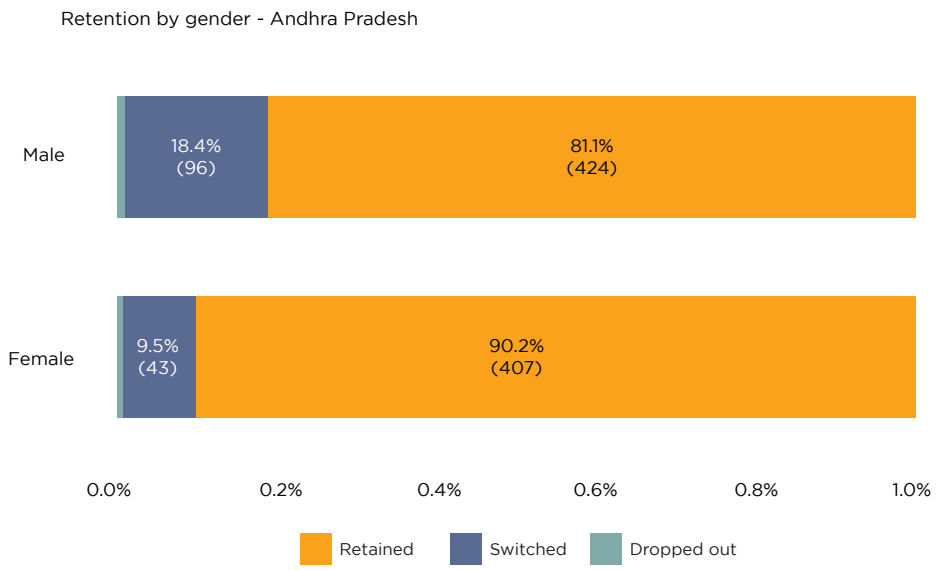
Andhra Pradesh

Gendered patterns emerge in school choices when switching from an RTE-allottedIn Andhra Pradesh, the state started the implementation of RTE 12(1)(c) in the year 2021-22. The survey captures schooling status of children one year after their admission to a private school allotted under RTE 12(1)(c). The telephonic survey was attempted with a sample of 1590 children and the respondents constituted 996 children, representing 62% of the sample. Completed surveys consist of parents of 534 male students and 462 female students, so the respondent sample has slightly skewed gender distribution.

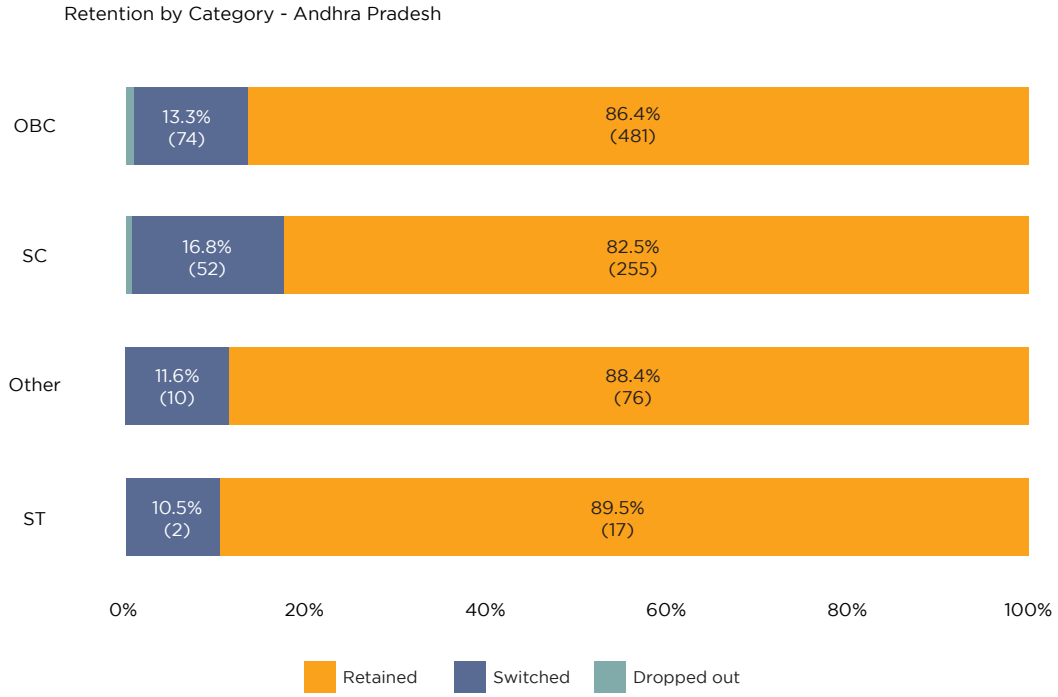
Highlights

- Retention: 86% of students from the 2023–24 cohort are retained, studying in their RTE allotted schools. (Refer figure 1 & 2).

- **Figure 1:** Retention by gender (Andhra Pradesh)



- **Figure 2:** Retention by category of application (Andhra Pradesh)



Reason for switching schools

- Among those who did switch schools, 53% cited affordability as the primary reason, highlighting a critical challenge for parents in the state.
- When students choose to switch schools, 40% move to private unaided schools, indicating a strong preference for Private unaided schools.
- When asked about a family's school-related expenditure, 94% respondents reported being asked to pay school-related fees—the highest among all states.[13] This appears to be linked to implementation during the 2023–24 academic year. Of those asked to pay a fee, 96% reported that managing these costs was either 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult'.

[13] In Andhra Pradesh as per the state notification dated 26-02-2023 "The reimbursement amount of per child expenditure to the school will be done by the parent from the amount they receive under the AmmaVodi scheme at the end of the academic year." However, based on interactions with parents during the survey, it was evident that they had not understood that they would be required to make such reimbursements to schools.

Economic status of students' families

- Proxies used for economic status include ability to afford private school, siblings schooling status and Asset ownership of families.
- We find that in Andhra Pradesh, only 12% of the respondents report that they could afford private schooling in the absence of the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, which reveals a high reliance on the RTE Act.
- Additionally, only 9% of the parents indicated that they had another child enrolled in private school without RTE 12(1)(c) support.
- The survey also includes questions on asset ownership, using National Family Health Surevy (NFHS) asset ownership indicators. Our findings reveal that 27% of respondents in the bottom asset quintile believe they can afford private education, in contrast to just 7% in the top quintile. Additionally, 31% of families in the lowest asset quintile report sending their children to private schools outside the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, whereas only 3% of those in the highest asset quintile do the same.

Reimbursements to schools

- In the state RTE 12(1)(c), reimbursement was notified to be paid by parents by utilising the Ammavodi Direct Benefit Transfers scheme.
- Interactions with parents revealed that they were unaware of the fee payment requirements and reimbursement amounts. Although the Ammavodi Direct Benefit Transfers scheme was meant to support school expenses, a lack of understanding led some parents to change schools to choose more affordable options.

Student's schooling experiences

- **Overall school experience:** The survey also asks questions to understand the schooling experience of children. We find that 89% parents agree or strongly agree that their child enjoys being in school. When asked about their perception of whether other children are preferred for opportunities, only 1.8% of parents reported that they believe other children are given preference. This is a positive indicator, showing that most children feel included in their schools for opportunities such as annual day or sports day.

- **Experiences with peers:** 99% parents in Andhra Pradesh perceive that children have an overall positive experience with their peers. To get a nuanced perspective the survey asked whether children feel that their classmates treat them differently from other peers. 15.3% parents in Andhra Pradesh reported their child is treated differently by peers.
  We also assess whether their child's school includes students from wealthier families, and whether their child is friends with those students. 19% parents report that their child is not friends with richer students in Andhra Pradesh which is significantly higher than other states.

- **Experiences with teachers:** In Andhra Pradesh we find that 95% parents answer in affirmative that teacher pays attention to their child. To further get nuanced response we ask whether the teacher pays equal or more attention as compared to other students, 72% parents report that teacher pays either equal or more attention. To understand parent-teacher relationships, the survey asks parent-teacher interaction frequency and finds that 49% of parents interact with teacher at least once a month or more frequently and 42% parents interact at least once in 2-3 months.

In conclusion, Andhra Pradesh reports an inclusive environment for children studying under the RTE 12(1)(c) provision. However, due to a lack of clarity on school reimbursements to be paid by parents has led many parents to change schools. Improving awareness of implementation and a consistent method of reimbursements directly through the state can ensure students continued enrolment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from this retention survey confirm that RTE 12(1)(c) continues to support school continuity for most students, with high retention rates across cohorts, genders, and categories. In several states—particularly Uttarakhand—and among groups like EWS students, the policy appears to be well-embedded, sustaining long-term enrolment even beyond the initial placement.

However, important differences emerge across contexts, reflecting how families interact with the policy over time. Boys are more likely to switch schools as compared to girls. Children belonging to SC and OBC categories are more likely to switch schools as compared to students belonging to ST and EWS categories.

Two states in particular stand out: Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, which together account for the majority of switching cases. In Chhattisgarh, families leave primarily due to administrative challenges and distance, and switchers are evenly split between government and private unaided schools, indicating diverse coping strategies. In Andhra Pradesh, affordability is the dominant reason for switching, and a large share of students move to private unaided schools, despite cost concerns—suggesting a strong preference for continuing schooling in private unaided schools.

Although dropout remains very low overall, Odisha alone accounts for 15 out of 19 recorded dropouts, with most linked to long travel distances. These cases highlight the importance of better aligning school allocation with family location and mobility. Government of Odisha's initiative on enabling a school transfer system within the state is a positive step in this direction.

The findings from this survey highlight important policy implications to strengthen RTE 12(1)(c) implementation:

Retention

Retention rates are generally high, but differences across states reveal critical barriers. Andhra Pradesh faces major challenges with affordability, while Chhattisgarh struggles with distance and administrative hurdles. Odisha, although having high retention, has the highest dropout rate. This suggests that localised strategies—addressing affordability in Andhra Pradesh, administrative clarity in Chhattisgarh, and distance concerns in Odisha—are needed to complement broader retention efforts.

Inclusion

Inclusion and retention appear to be separate issues: no clear link exists between them across gender, states, or application categories. Odisha stands out with higher number of exclusionary experiences of children, suggesting a need for targeted sensitisation initiatives, especially for EWS and girls. Girls generally report higher experiences of exclusion across states, warranting gender-sensitive responses.

Further qualitative research on the schooling experiences of children is necessary, to understand and address concerns around the inclusion of RTE 12(1)(c) children in schools.

Expenditure

A critical concern arises in Andhra Pradesh, where 94% of the respondents report having to pay school-related fees, and almost all of them find it difficult to do so. Further analysis is needed to understand which groups are benefiting from RTE 12(1)(c) in the state and whether implementation modalities are unintentionally excluding those most in need. Switching schools because of financial strain defeats the Act's core purpose of providing free and equitable education.

Targeting

While some families from higher asset quintiles benefit from RTE 12(1)(c), this is not necessarily a sign of poor targeting. All of the families still belong to the eligible groups as defined by the state. Moreover, only 0.92% of students fall in the intersection of i) being able to afford schooling in absence of RTE 12(1)(c) ii) students with siblings who are going to school without the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, and iii) belonging to the highest asset quintile, suggesting that overall targeting is aligned with the social inclusion goals of the RTE Act section 12(1)(c).
However, deeper exploration is necessary to understand who might be getting excluded through the current targeting mechanisms, particularly those who are eligible but unable to apply or retain due to affordability, discrimination, or administrative barriers.

Recommendations for Future Retention Surveys

Design

Given the knowledge gap regarding perceived discrimination faced by children in school and its effect on retention in the long run, future surveys could benefit from including more elements of qualitative research such as key informant interviews, focus-group discussions, and participant observation. A qualitative approach could also benefit the understanding of difficulty in the application process and help in supporting improvements in the process.

Data Collection

Use of a standard survey tool such as SurveyCTO, which allows for marking questions as mandatory and automatically captures the duration of the call, could improve the monitoring and quality check measures during the data collection phase. Additionally, using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) case management approach, which can be used on the SurveyCTO platform, can aid in improving the overall call management and call performance monitoring processes.

Moreover, there is room to improve enumerator training and strengthen mechanisms for incorporating continuous feedback from the weekly HFC, in order to ensure higher quality in the collection of qualitative data and to reduce missing responses to mandatory questions. Incorporating back-checks into the data collection process may validate the quality of data collected.

Improving Survey Questions

To understand whether parents who already have a child in private school can influence their awareness of RTE 12(1)(c) provision, it is important to accurately measure the grade in which a sibling is admitted into private school, before asking a question regarding their enrolment under RTE 12(1)(c).

Furthermore, collecting data about the gender of the other sibling can help us analyse household-level gender disparities and preferential treatment of different genders.

Together, these findings show that the policy's core promise is largely being fulfilled. However, targeted refinements may be needed, especially in states facing distinct implementation hurdles or where family circumstances create additional obstacles to long-term retention.[14] The MIDP Team hopes that incorporating the given recommendations will strengthen the Indus Action Retention Survey an even more robust source of monitoring student's retention and experiences in its subsequent versions.

[14] Government of Odisha's transfer module initiative is a step in this direction, which allows parents to request for the transfer of school under the 12(1)(c) provision in relevant circumstances. Odisha Transfer 12(1)(c).pdf

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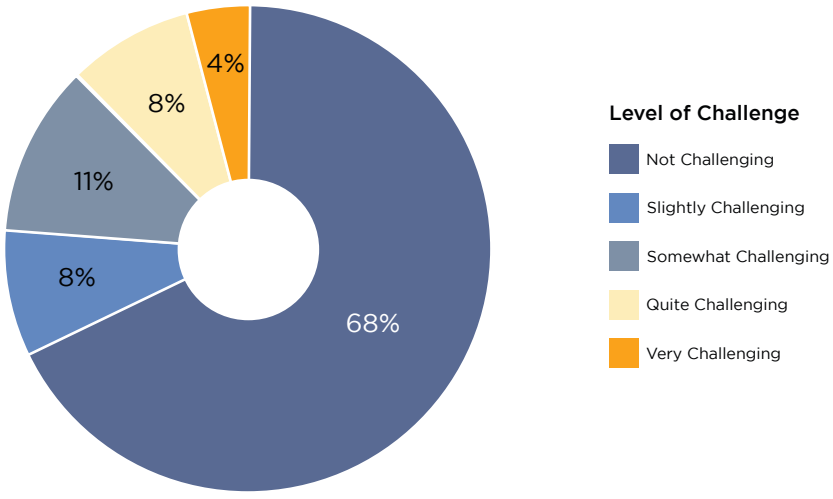
APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix I: Application-Related Concerns

Figure A: Level of challenge in filling the application



Appendix II: Type of School Enrolled in after Switching

Figure A: By Cohort

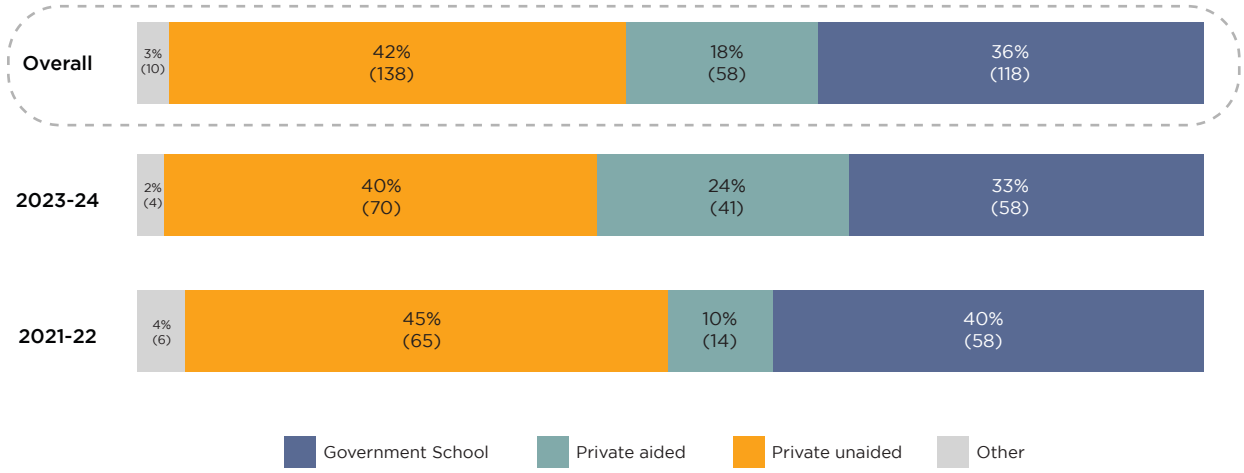


Figure B: By Gender

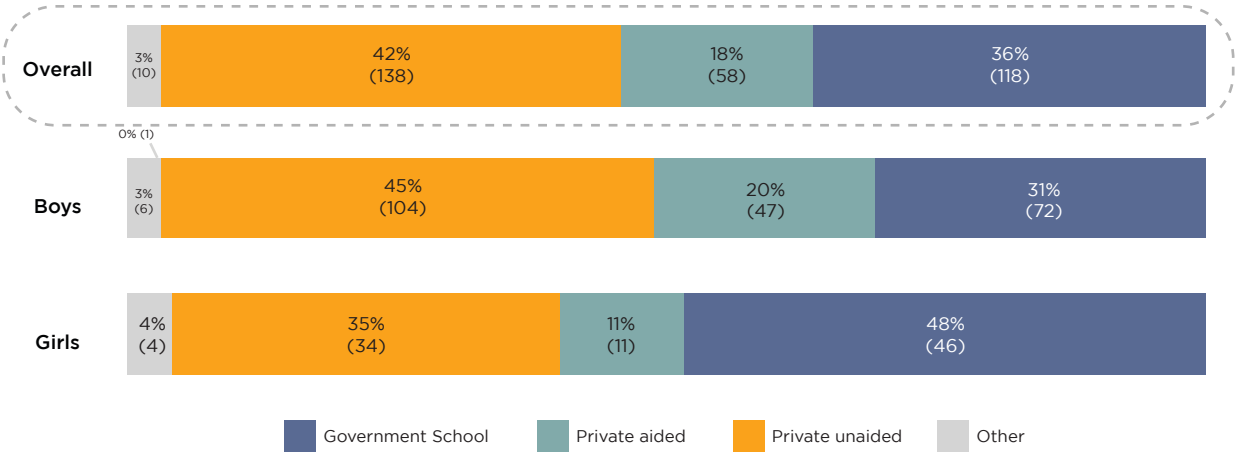


Figure C: By State

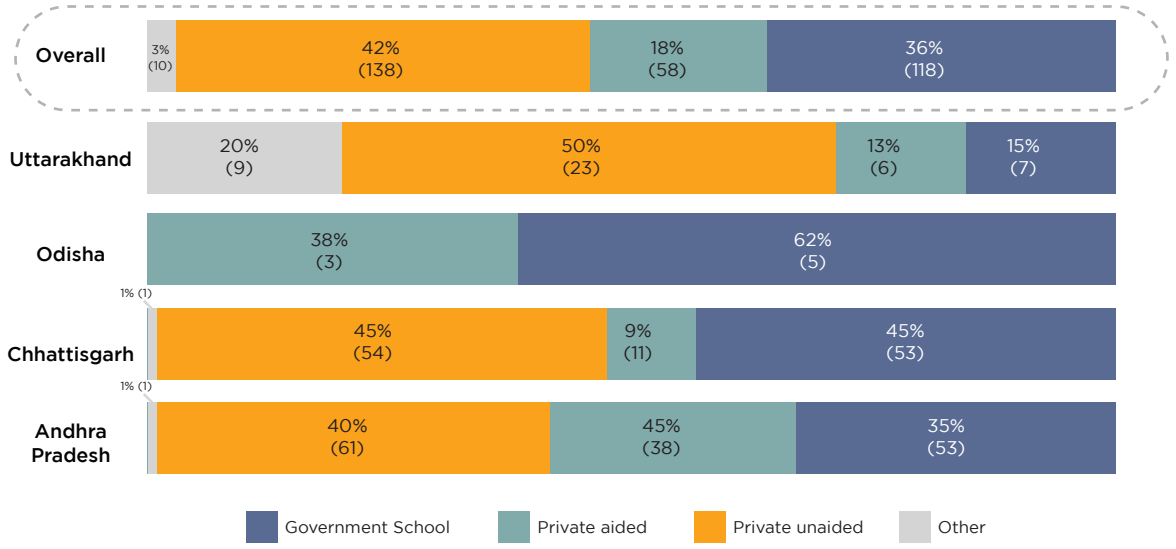
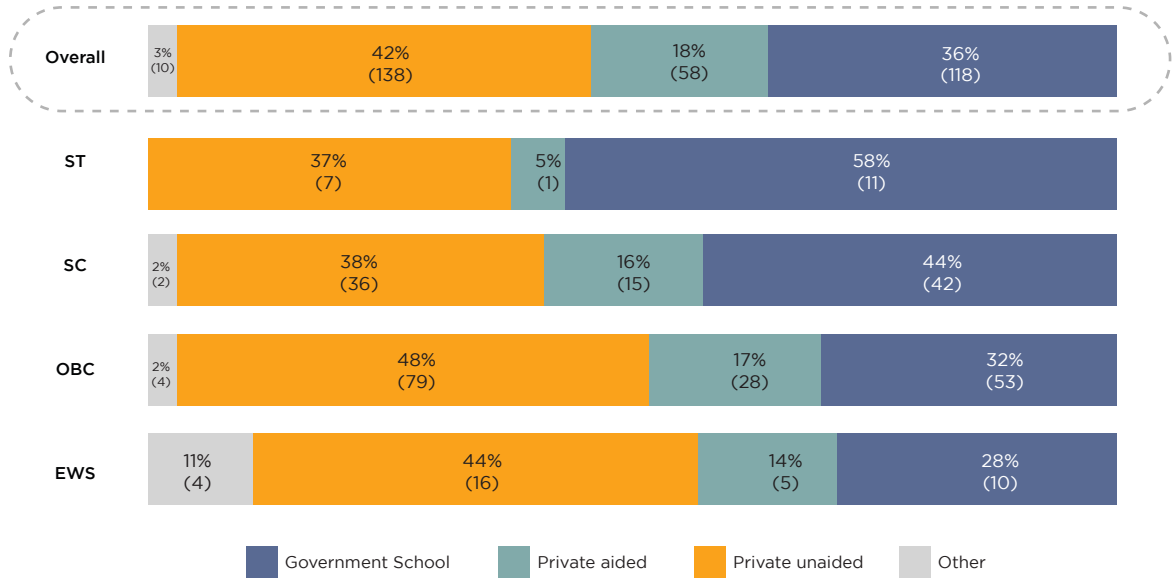
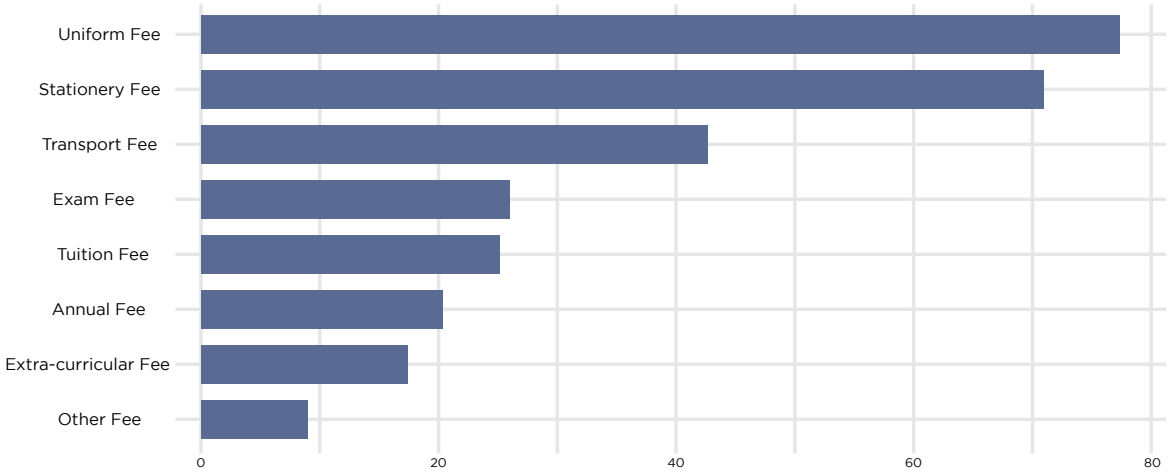


Figure D: By Category



Appendix III: School-Related Expenditure

Figure A: Details of Different Fees Paid



Appendix IV: Perception of Discrimination

Figure A: Child Enjoys School - By State

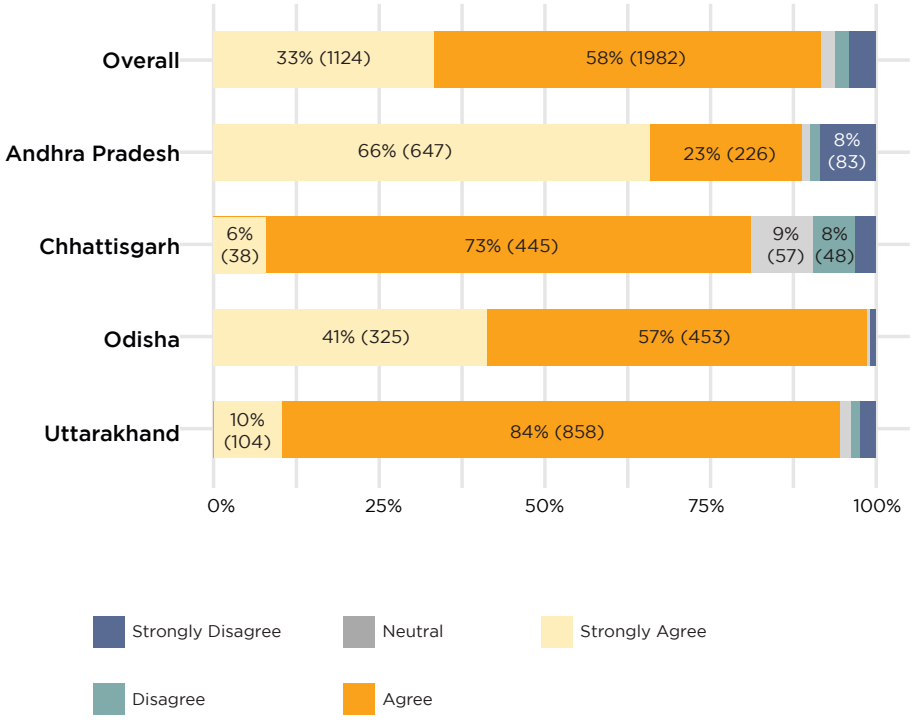


Figure B: Perception of Child Treated Differently by Peers - By State

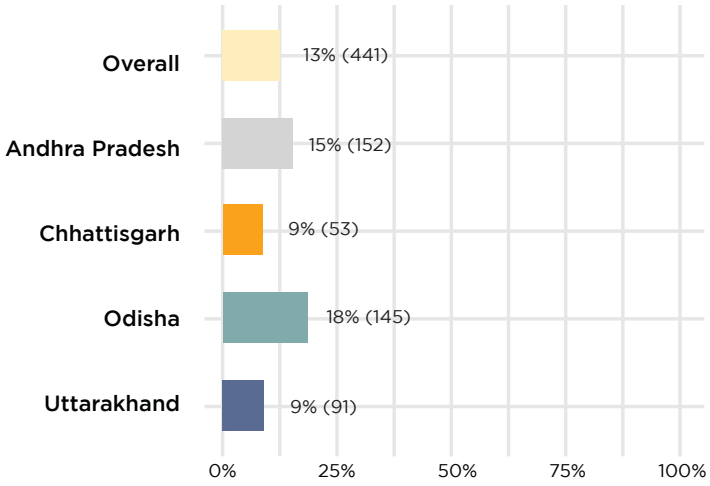


Figure C: Perception of Child Treated Differently by Peers - By Gender

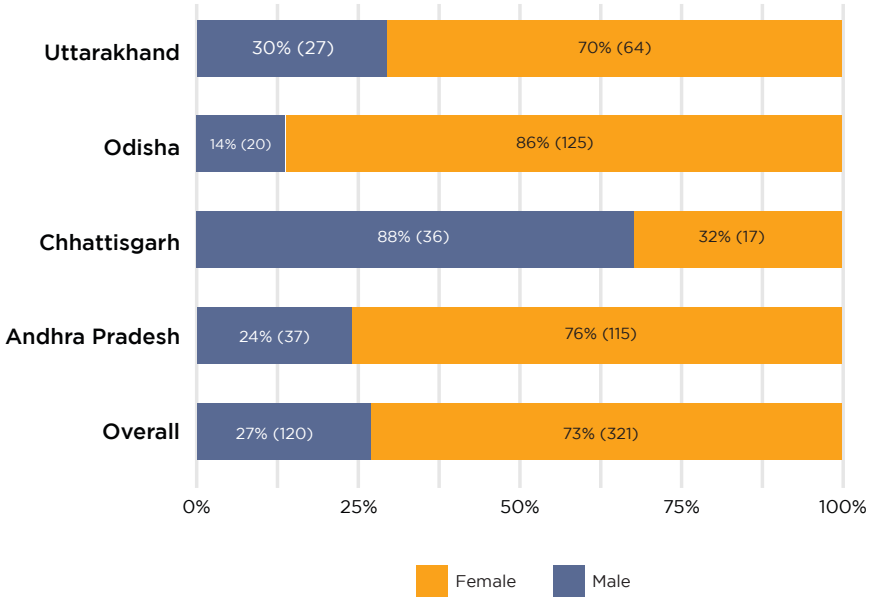


Figure D: Rich Students in the school - By State

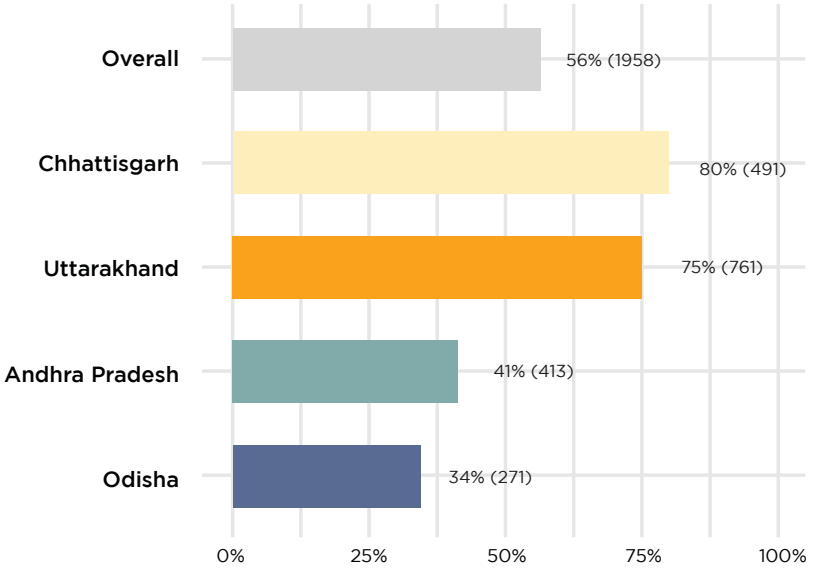


Figure E: Child Friend with Rich Students - By State

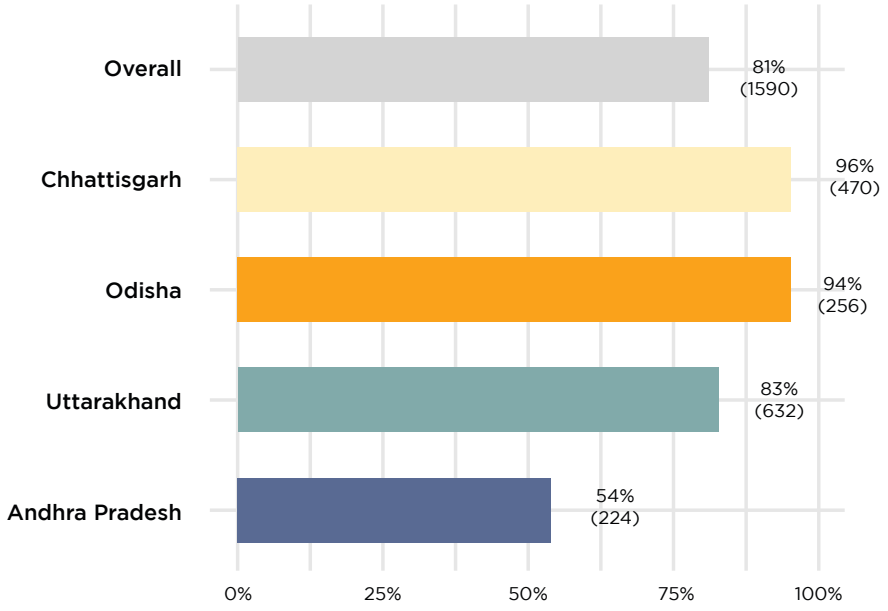


Figure F: Teacher Pays Equal Attention - By State

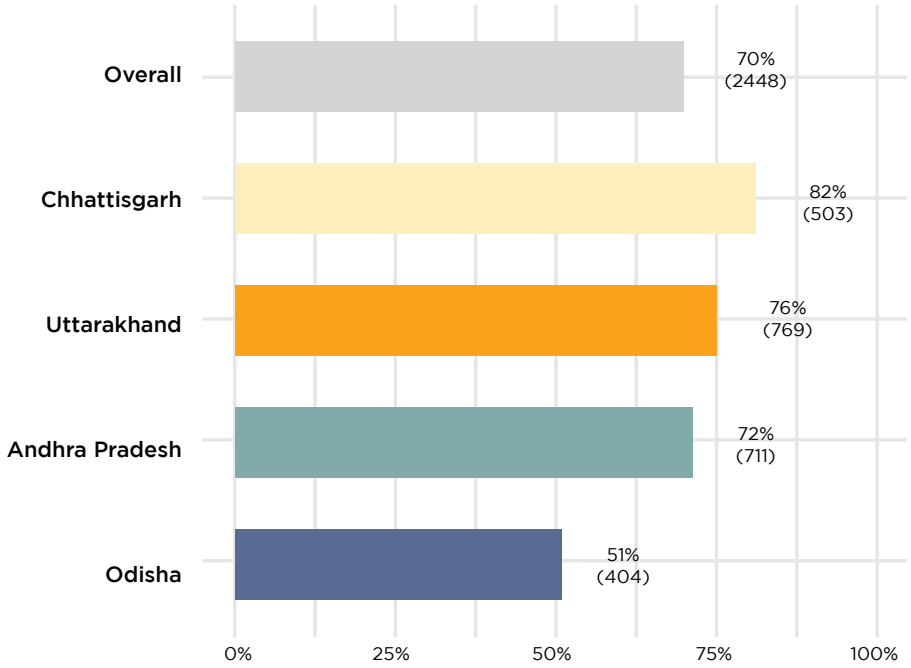


Figure G: Frequency of Interaction with Teacher

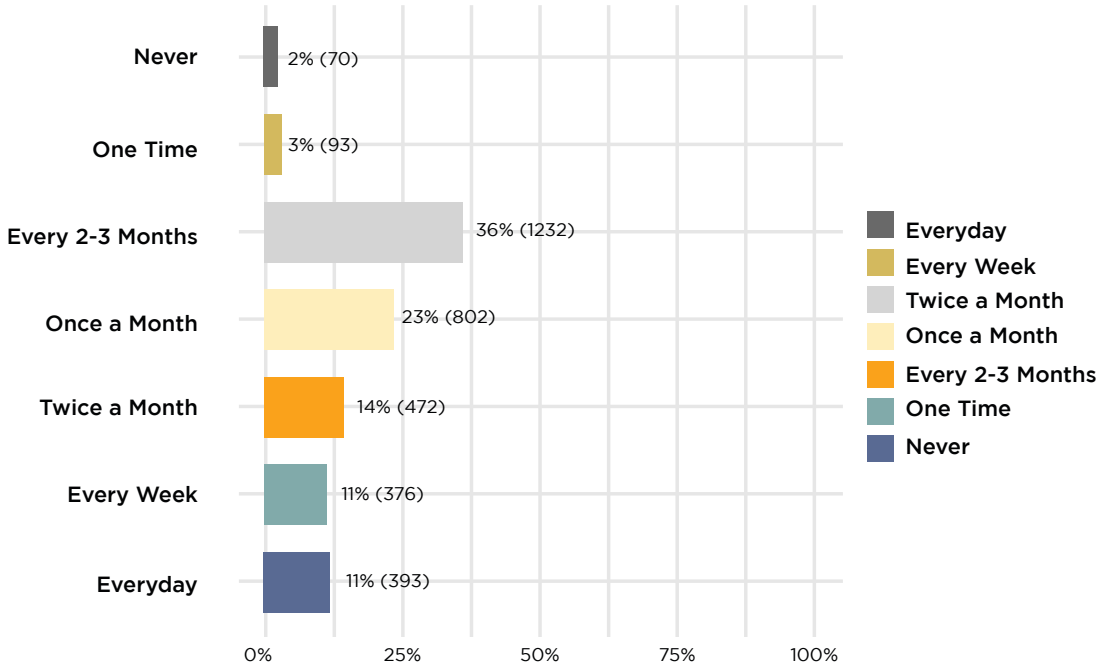
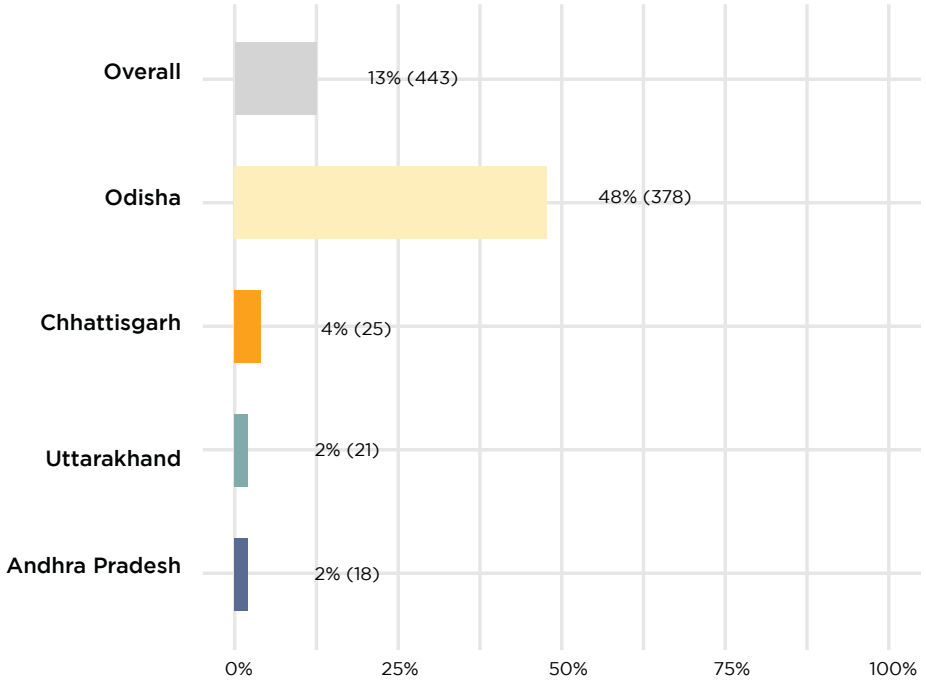


Figure H: Teacher Overlooks Child for Opportunities



Appendix V: Targeting

Figure A: Perception of Affordability by Asset Quintile - By State

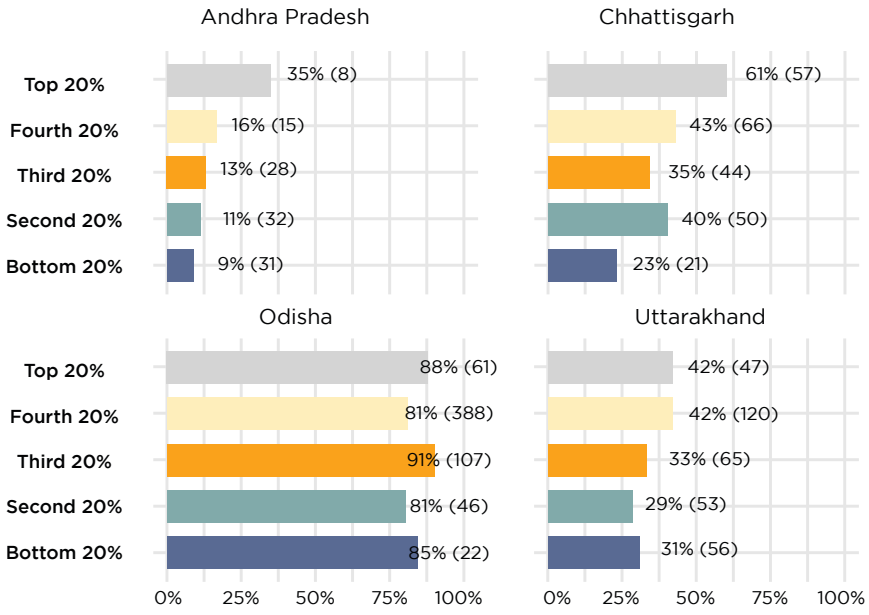
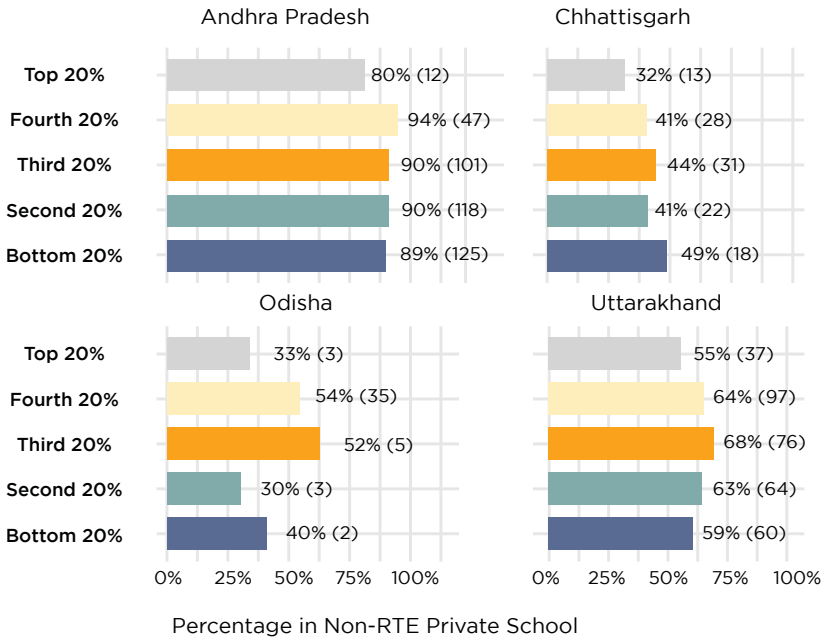
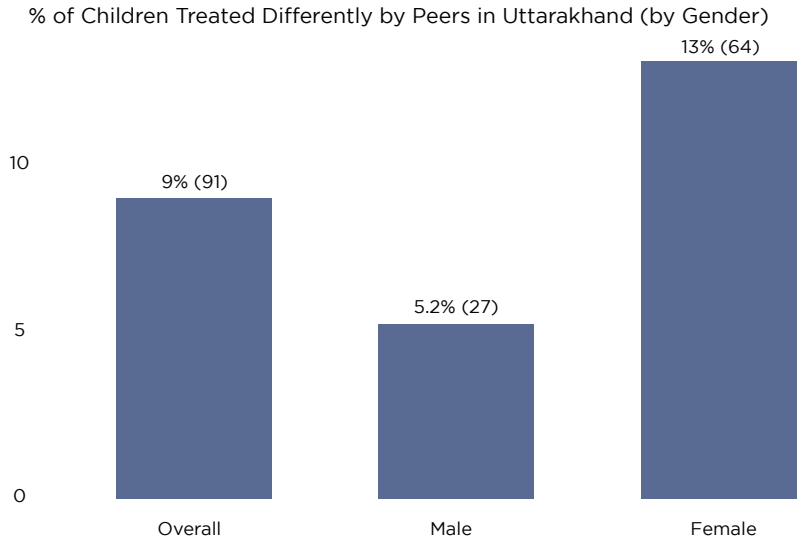
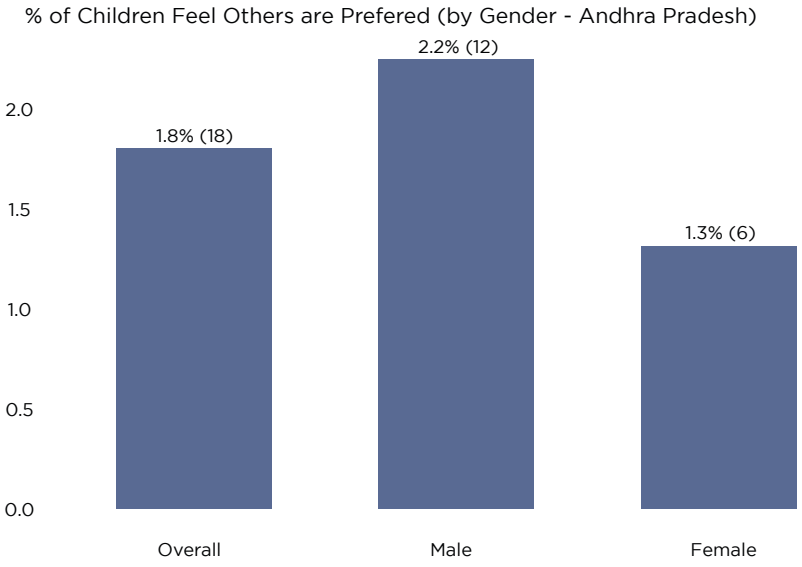


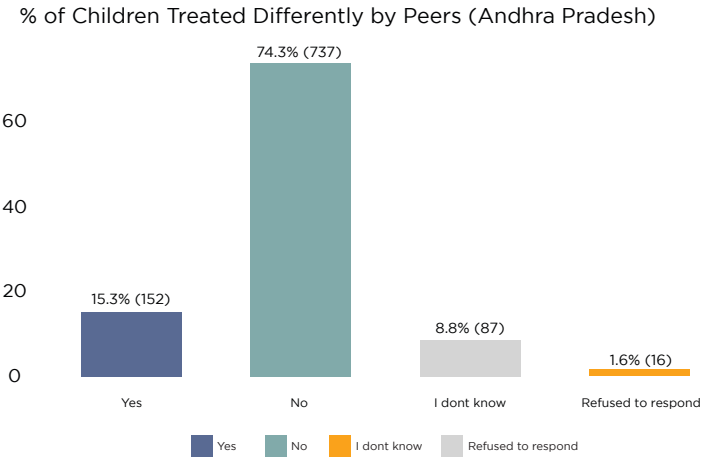
Figure B: Siblings in Private School by Asset Quintile - By State



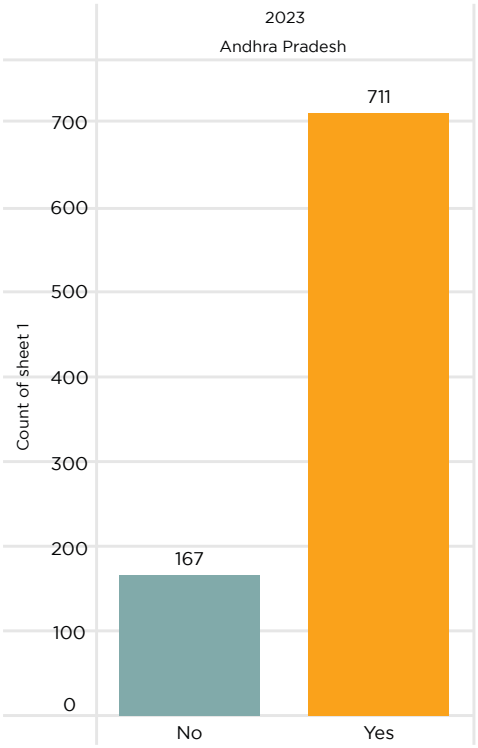
Appendix VI: State Summaries



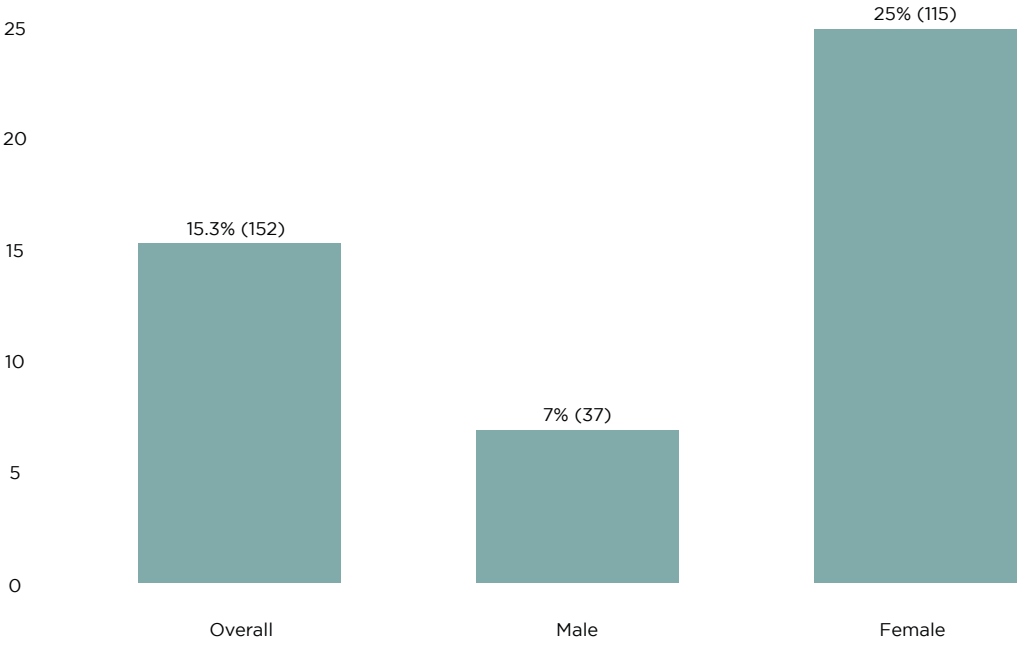




Teacher pays equal attention



% of Children Treated Differently by Peers in Andhra Pradesh (by Gender)



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