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ACTION**
Enabling Social Protection

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Making RTE Section
12(1)(c) Work for Every
Child





State Best Practices for an Inclusive, Transparent and Citizen-Centric System.

Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act is one of India's most ambitious inclusion mandates. It enables children from economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups to access private unaided schools through a 25% reservation at the entry level.

However, for the most vulnerable families, the legal entitlement is only the starting point. A family must first know about the right, understand eligibility, collect documents, identify schools, apply correctly, navigate verification, participate in the lottery, secure admission, remain enrolled, resolve grievances, and avoid exclusion when they migrate or move beyond Class VIII.

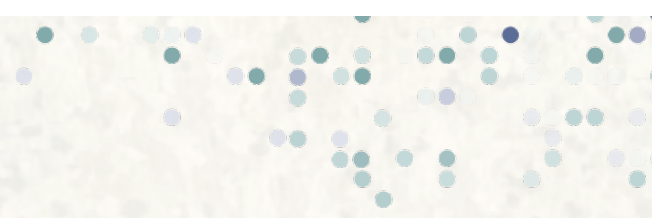
A strong Section 12(1)(c) system must therefore be designed around the citizen's journey, not only around administrative compliance. The following best practices from across States show how Section 12(1)(c) can be made easier, more inclusive, and more constitutionally aligned in practice.

1. Awareness and Outreach: Taking the Right to the Family

The issue: In many States, information about Section 12(1)(c) remains confined to government notifications, official portals, or school-level notices. This assumes that eligible families already know about the entitlement, have digital access, and can track admission timelines themselves. In practice, this excludes precisely those families the law is intended to reach - first-generation learners, migrant households, informal workers, families without smartphones, and parents with limited literacy or digital access.

What good practice looks like: States should treat awareness generation as a core implementation function, not an optional activity. Outreach should begin before the application window opens and continue through registration, verification, lottery, admission, and grievance stages. A strong model includes helplines, local-language IEC including radio jingles, regional news scrolls, SMS reminders, social media updates, community mobilisation, and partnerships with local bodies, Aanganwadi workers, ASHAs, SHGs, panchayats, ward councillors, schools, and civil society organisations.

State Best practice: Odisha offers a strong model of proactive, multi-channel awareness at the pre-application stage with regular coordination between Block Education Officers (BEOs), schools, and the Directorate of Elementary Education. Odisha also undertakes virtual training of schools for alignment on registration, verification timelines, and parent query resolution. For the academic year 2026-27, 3,500 private schools participated in this virtual orientation program. What is especially notable is the Odisha government's partnership with like-minded civil society organisations at the ground level to support awareness generation, ensuring that information reaches families who may not otherwise access official portals or government notices, is



especially notable. The use of “**nudge SMS**” to previous years’ non-allotted students is an effort to re-engage eligible families who had already shown interest but have not accessed the provision due to non-allotment of seats, incomplete documentation or process fatigue. 19,554 nudge SMS were sent on February 25, 2026, of which 17,774 students registered on the portal. Together, these measures demonstrate a more deliberate and inclusive approach to pre-application awareness, anchored both in administrative follow-through and community-based mobilisation.

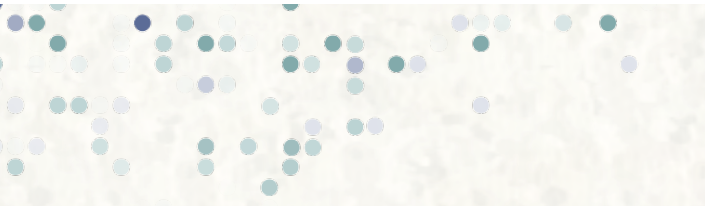
2. Eligibility and Sub-Reservations: Reaching the Most Vulnerable First

The issue: Eligibility thresholds and disadvantaged group categories vary widely across States, resulting in uneven targeting under Section 12(1)(c). At one end, some States prescribe very low income limits, excluding families who remain poor but fall marginally above the cut-off. At the other end, some States adopt broad or high EWS thresholds, in some cases extending up to ₹8 lakh per annum, which risks diluting the focus of the provision by including households that may not be among the most economically vulnerable, especially where other welfare schemes use lower EWS thresholds such as ₹3 lakh. This lack of calibration weakens prioritisation within a limited 25% quota. A broad EWS/DG category may also fail to adequately prioritise children facing deeper and intersecting forms of exclusion, such as girls, SC/ST children, children with disabilities, orphans, children of migrant workers, street children, and children affected by HIV.

What good practice looks like: States should periodically revise EWS income thresholds based on inflation, cost of living, and comparable welfare benchmarks. They should also consider targeted sub-reservations or priority categories within the 25% quota so that the most vulnerable children are not crowded out within the general EWS/DG pool.

State best practices:

- ▣ **Odisha** provides a calibrated model for filling Section 12(1)(c) seats: 15% of seats are reserved for children from Disadvantaged Groups and 10% for children from Economically Weaker Sections. Within the DG quota, 10% is earmarked for SC, ST and SEBC children, while 5% is reserved for highly vulnerable children, including children without a settled home, children found begging, child labourers, street children, children with special needs, children in foster care, children of manual scavengers, migrants, construction/road workers, landless agricultural labourers, war martyrs or war widows, HIV-affected or infected children, and orphans. The EWS quota is reserved for children of BPL families/cardholders under government poverty alleviation programmes, with an income ceiling of ₹1,80,000 per annum. In case seats remain unavailable in either category, Odisha also permits interchangeability between the DG and EWS groups.
- ▣ **Karnataka** provides micro-reservations within the 25% quota for Scheduled Castes (7.5%), Scheduled Tribes (1.5%) and Other Disadvantaged Categories (16%).

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- **Uttarakhand** provides a gender-focused model by reserving 50% of EWS/DG seats in co-educational schools for girls which has enabled gender parity in schooling access under the RTE Section 12(1)(c) provision.
 - **Andhra Pradesh** provides useful examples of prioritising vulnerable sub-groups within the broader admission framework: 5% for Disadvantaged Groups (reserved for orphans, HIV affected children, and children with disabilities), 10% for SC, 4% for ST, and 6% for for EWS (i.e., OBC / BC, minorities, and open category families whose annual income falls below the EWS limit).
 - **Tripura** provides a strong example of calibrated prioritisation within the 25% quota under Section 12(1)(c). Rather than treating all EWS/DG applicants as a single pool, it follows a graded lottery system that prioritises children facing deeper vulnerability - including orphans/CNCP children, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS, transgender children, children eligible for sponsorship under the Juvenile Justice Act, children from tea garden and migrant worker families, and SC/ST children from Antyodaya/BPL households. It also recognises children who become EWS due to the death of an earning parent or guardian, and children of martyred soldiers or personnel killed in the line of duty. Tripura further applies neighbourhood preference without making distance a ground for rejection: children within 1 km receive first preference, followed by those within 3 km, and then children beyond 3 km but within the block if seats remain vacant. This model is useful because it preserves broad access under Section 12(1)(c), while ensuring that children facing deeper and intersecting disadvantages are not crowded out within the general EWS/DG pool.

3. Pre-Admission Support: Helping Parents Apply Correctly

The issue: For many families, the challenge begins before the application. Parents may not know which schools they can apply to, what documents are required, whether they are eligible, how to fill out the form, or how to correct errors. An online process through transparent and effective without assisted access can become exclusionary for families without smartphones, internet access, digital literacy, or nearby support centres.

What good practice looks like: States should create structured pre-admission support through help desks at schools, Aanganwadi centres, ward offices, panchayat offices, CSCs, and block education offices. Application forms should be simple, document checklists should be clear, school options should be easy to discover, and parents should receive SMS/WhatsApp reminders at each stage.

State best practices:

- **Gujarat** allows eligible but non-allotted applicants to revise school preferences in later rounds, improving seat utilisation. Government of Gujarat provides RTE receiving centres where parents who are unable to complete the online form can submit a physical form, receive an acknowledgment, and have centre personnel upload the application and provide the application number. Gujarat has also used GIS school mapping, including a reported Google Maps tie-up, to improve neighbourhood-based school allocation and reduce allotment errors.

- **Tamil Nadu** provides assisted access for parents who cannot complete the online process independently. While applications are submitted online, schools and educational offices are required to provide internet, computer and scanner facilities to parents who lack access. Schools receiving direct applications must issue acknowledgment receipts and ensure the application is uploaded to EMIS or submitted at designated offices for online entry. This makes the process more accessible for families without devices, connectivity, or digital literacy.
- **Delhi** is notable for identifying schools that cater to children with special needs, which helps families make more informed school choices.

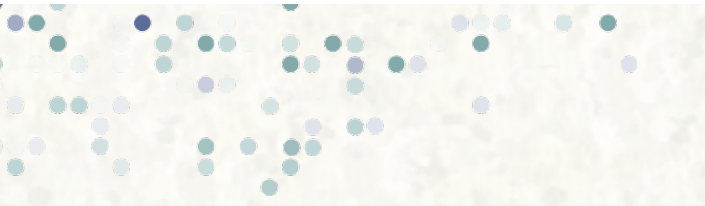
4. Transparent Lottery: Making Selection Fair and Auditable

The issue: Where applications exceed available seats, a lottery decides admission. If the lottery is conducted offline or at the school level, it creates risks of opacity, discretion, and manipulation. Parents may not know why their child was not selected, whether seats were properly disclosed, or whether the process was fair.

What good practice looks like: A centralised online lottery should be integrated with the State admission portal. It should display school-wise seats, eligible applicants, allotment results, waitlists, and category-wise outcomes. The process should generate an auditable digital trail and automatically inform parents through SMS, email, or WhatsApp.

State best practices:

- **Delhi, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Tripura and Rajasthan** offer examples of transparency in the lottery process through online portals that allow families to check application status, print/download applications, view school-seat information, access neighbourhood mapping, check lottery/allotment outcomes, and raise or track grievances. Odisha is particularly useful because its portal publishes the lottery/allotment timeline and allows parents to check results using their registration ID, while Tripura and Uttarakhand show a more integrated portal design with application status, seat information, mapping and grievance modules. Chhattisgarh separately allows parents to track student registration/application status and provides structured grievance categories.
- **Andhra Pradesh** balances parent choice with targeted inclusion while protecting reservations at the level of each school's seats. In practice, this means that seats for specific vulnerable categories are not pooled only at the State or district level, but are accounted for at the point where admission is actually granted - the individual school. This helps ensure that micro-reservations translate into real access across schools, rather than being absorbed unevenly in the overall lottery. At the same time, allowing parents to list multiple school preferences helps improve seat utilisation, because applicants can be considered across more than one eligible school instead of losing out if their first choice is unavailable.

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- ▣ **Tripura** offers a highly inclusive lottery model by classifying applicants into priority levels, ensuring that children facing higher vulnerability, including orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS, transgender children, and children of sex workers, are considered first. It also provides rules for edge cases such as duplicate applications, multiple-category eligibility, identical applicants, vacant seats, and withdrawals.

5. Continuity Beyond Class VIII: Preventing Drop-Off After Elementary School

The issue: Section 12(1)(c) applies only up to Class VIII. A child who enters a private school under the quota may be forced to leave after elementary school if the family cannot afford fees for Classes IX to XII. This disrupts learning continuity, peer networks, retention, and long-term educational outcomes.

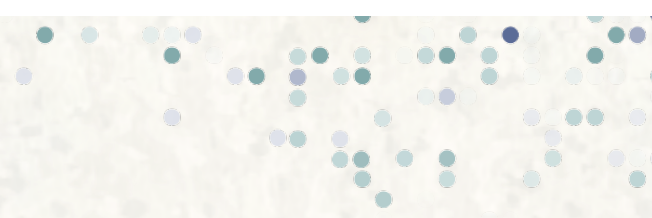
What good practice looks like: States should be encouraged to extend support beyond Class VIII, with clear reimbursement norms and student tracking, and financial support for subsidising or fully reimbursing continuation up to Class XII. The Ministry of Education may frame guiding principles and incentives for States willing to support continuity up to Class XII, including through cost-sharing, reimbursement, or grant-based mechanisms.

State best practices:

- ▣ **Chhattisgarh** has extended the benefit of Section 12(1)(c) to Classes IX to XII since 2019, ensuring that students are not forced out of school after Class VIII solely because of affordability barriers. This extension is being supported from the State's own funds, without Central Government reimbursement, and appears feasible in part because of the relatively low per-child cost that allows the State to reimburse schools within its own fiscal capacity.
- ▣ **Delhi** offers a distinct model for continuity beyond Class VIII through its land-allotment-based freeship obligations. Certain private unaided schools that were allotted government land by the Delhi Development Authority are required to provide free education to EWS/DG students beyond the elementary stage, including up to Class XII. While this is not a general extension of Section 12(1)(c) across all private schools, but a State-specific mechanism tied to land allotment conditions and Delhi's regulatory framework, it helps support educational continuity for students admitted to such schools.

6. Student Transfers: Protecting Children from Migration-Linked Dropout

The issue: Many families accessing Section 12(1)(c) are migrant labour households. When families move across districts or States, children may lose the benefit of their admission. Similar risks arise when a school closes, does not offer higher classes, or when medical or family emergencies require relocation.



What good practice looks like: States should adopt a simple student transfer policy covering intra-State and inter-State transfers in defined circumstances, including migration, school closure, non-availability of elementary classes, medical emergencies, or other genuine exigencies. For inter-State transfers, reimbursement responsibility must be clarified between the originating and receiving States.

State best practices:

▣ **Odisha** has created an intra-State transfer framework under Section 12(1)(c). Transfers may be permitted where the school closes, does not offer elementary classes, the child faces life-threatening medical conditions, or parents/guardians are transferred to another location. The process is routed through education authorities, requires vacant seats in the destination school, and is linked to the RTE Paradarshi portal for updating student records. This creates a child-centric transfer model that supports continuity of education.

7. Grievance Redressal: Giving Families a Remedy

The issue: Without a functional grievance mechanism, families have little recourse when applications are rejected, schools deny admission, documents are disputed, informal fees are demanded, or children face discrimination.

What good practice looks like: States should establish simple, accessible, time-bound grievance systems under Section 32 of the RTE Act. Parents should be able to file complaints online and offline, track status, upload documents, and escalate unresolved issues. The SCPCR or designated RTE Protection Authority should function as an appellate and monitoring body.

State best practices:

▣ **Odisha** has launched an online grievance redressal system through the RTE Paradarshi portal, enabling parents, students, and schools to raise grievances, upload supporting documents, choose complaint categories, and track status through a registration or grievance ID. This converts grievance redressal from an informal process into a trackable accountability mechanism.

▣ **Chhattisgarh** provides a useful example of application-stage grievance redressal through its RTE portal, which allows parents to raise complaints against the relevant authority, including the DEO, nodal officer, DPI, or private school. The portal recognises multiple categories of grievances that may arise during the admission cycle, including issues relating to the student, habitation/residence, private schools, nodal officers, DEOs, application forms, documents, and admission. Such a categorised grievance system is important because many exclusions occur before admission is completed, for instance, where a parent is unable to submit or correct an application, documents are wrongly rejected, residence or neighbourhood mapping is disputed, verification is delayed, or a school refuses admission after allotment.



8. Reimbursements and PCC: Making School Participation Sustainable

The issue: Delayed, unclear, or inadequate reimbursements reduce school participation and may create resistance to admitting children under Section 12(1)(c). Per Child Cost calculations are often opaque, unrevised, or misaligned with actual costs, while reimbursement processes may be documentation-heavy and difficult to track.

What good practice looks like: States should adopt digitised, time-bound reimbursement protocols with standard forms, document checklists, verification stages, appeal mechanisms, and payment timelines. PCC should be calculated transparently, revised periodically, and based on clearly identified budget heads. Where costs such as books, uniforms, transport, or other entitlements are excluded from PCC, they should be separately provided or reimbursed.

State best practices:

- ▣ **Karnataka** has a dedicated online reimbursement portal with English and Kannada training manuals, online training videos, and appeal software that allows schools to correct submitted claim details.
- ▣ **Odisha** uses a detailed Form A process requiring school-level disclosure of UDISE details, recognition certificate, student eligibility, fee details, teacher salary, per-child expenditure, and bank details, followed by multi-level verification and defined timelines.
- ▣ **Bihar's Gyandeeep portal** provides a digitised reimbursement workflow, with school registration, student-wise data entry, block and district verification, PFMS approval, and DBT transfer to school accounts.
- ▣ **Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan** provide useful participatory PCC-setting models by involving private unaided school representatives in committees that decide per-child cost.
- ▣ **Rajasthan** provides a structured reimbursement model under its RTE Rules, with reimbursement made directly to schools twice a year. The first reimbursement covers April to August and is payable in October, while the final reimbursement covers September to the end of the academic session and is payable by the end of June. Schools are also required to maintain a separate bank account for reimbursement receipts, creating a clearer payment trail. Rajasthan's online portal is also notable because it was designed as an end-to-end MIS covering application submission, enrolment verification, and school reimbursement, reducing administrative burden and improving trackability.

9. Centralised Online Portals: Building the System Around the Citizen Journey

The issue: Fragmented district-level or offline implementation results in variation across admission timelines, school registration, student verification, lottery procedures, grievance redressal, and reimbursement. A child's access to a statutory entitlement should not depend on the administrative capacity of a particular district.

What good practice looks like: A centralized portal should cover the full lifecycle: school registration, seat disclosure, school discovery, student application, document verification, lottery, admission confirmation, grievance redressal, transfer tracking, reimbursement, and dashboards. However, digital systems must be supported by offline facilitation so they do not exclude families without digital access.

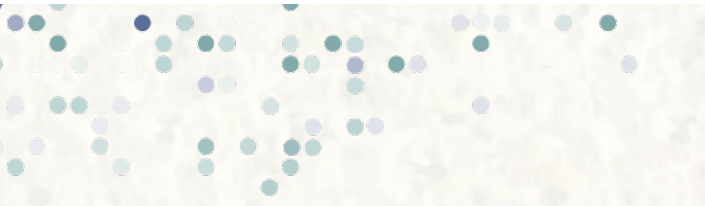
State best practices:

- ▣ **Chandigarh and Andhra Pradesh** demonstrate the value of centralising core admission workflows, including school registration, student registration, verification, lottery, and seat allotment, through online portals, reducing district-level variation and improving administrative consistency.
- ▣ **Odisha, Uttarakhand and Delhi** show how centralised portals can be built around the parent journey. Their systems provide parent-facing features such as application status, application print/download, school information, eligibility guidance, grievance registration/tracking, and computerised lottery or allotment processes. Odisha's RTE Paradarshi portal is particularly notable for its broader end-to-end design, linking admissions with stakeholder training, monitoring, transfer tracking, grievance redressal, and reimbursement-linked processes.

10. Post-Admission Monitoring and Inclusive Schooling: Ensuring Access Translates into Retention

The issue: Admission under Section 12(1)(c) is only the first step. Many States have limited mechanisms to track whether admitted children continue in school, whether they face exclusion, receive entitlements, or whether schools adopt inclusive classroom practices. Without post-admission monitoring, implementation is measured only by enrollment numbers, not by retention, learning experience, or meaningful inclusion.

What good practice looks like: States should institutionalise post-admission tracking of Section 12(1)(c) students through retention surveys, school-level monitoring, grievance mechanisms, and periodic reviews of students' classroom experiences. Monitoring should capture whether children remain enrolled, transition across grades, receive books/uniforms/other entitlements where applicable, and experience inclusion within the school environment. This should be complemented by qualitative research on classroom and school practices that support integration, belonging, and non-discrimination.



State best practices:

- Indus Action conducts retention surveys to understand students' experiences beyond enrolment, including whether children admitted under Section 12(1)(c) continue in school and what barriers they face after admission.
- Indus Action's ongoing Inclusive Practices Study uses qualitative research to identify school and classroom practices that support inclusion, helping move the conversation from access alone to students' everyday experience of schooling.
- System-level studies by NCPCR and NITI Aayog provide useful frameworks for assessing State implementation of Section 12(1)(c), including gaps in monitoring, grievance redressal, reimbursement, and student retention.



To know more about Indus Action's work

