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Migration and Inclusive Education: Issues and Challenges faced by Caregivers of Children with Special Needs in North India

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ABSTRACT

In North India's vast migrant corridors—channeling 55 million workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi—caregivers of children with special needs (CWSN) confront systemic exclusion from inclusive education, despite RPwD Act mandates, leaving 180,000-240,000 vulnerable children (2.21% prevalence among 8-11 million accompanying minors) with Haryana's mere 0.92% enrollment. This thematic analysis distills five core barriers: 1: Admission Denials (70% from documentation/Aadhaar gaps and "inadequate facilities" claims); 2: Infrastructure Shortfalls (55% absent ramps/toilets, forcing Rs. 15,000-25,000/child aid costs amid vacancies); 3: Teacher Training (more than 65% untrained teachers facing Hindi-Punjabi language barriers and IEP exclusions); 4: Social Stigma (70% bullying/exclusion as "troublemakers," 53% discrimination against Muslim caregivers); 5: Financial-Emotional Burdens (40-50% maternal job losses, more than 50% income consumed by costs, sibling care pressures). Exposing policy inertia in portable records, seasonal hostels, and multilingual supports, findings urge interstate data-sharing, CWSN-specific interventions, and caregiver capacity-building to advance SDG 4 equity.

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Keywords: Migrant CWSN, inclusive education barriers, North India, RPwD.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right under Article 21A of the Indian constitution and a critical factor in fostering an inclusive society that respects and supports the needs of all children, including those with special needs. In India, children with special needs (CWSN) face numerous barriers to accessing quality education, particularly in the northern states such as Haryana, Delhi, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. Rural to Urban and interstate migration from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar to Delhi NCR and Punjab creates portability failures of RPwD Act 2016 entitlements and RTE 2009 quotas, as schools reject admissions lacking prior records or migration documentation infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate teacher training, and social stigma (Singal, 2016; Dhaliwal, 2024). These systematic hurdles not only impede academic inclusion but also impose substantial financial and emotional burdens on families. These predominantly female caregivers—accompanying CWSN during seasonal labor—navigate spatio-temporal mismatches between fixed schooling calendars and cyclical relocations that sever therapy continuity and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (Rashid et al., 2022; Shekhar, 2020).

Qualitative narratives reveal existential struggles: disrupted peer relationships, linguistic alienation in regional-medium schools, and resilience through informal networks, yet northern migrant corridors lag due to policy silos—rigid Aadhaar requirements and non-portable entitlements (Kumar & Sharma, 2023). Studies show parents relay emotional exhaustion from persistent bureaucratic battles, social stigma, and the struggle to obtain adequate educational support for their children (Shekhar, 2020; Fernandez, 2024). Many describe isolation driven by community misconceptions and enduring challenges in securing and sustaining inclusive schooling environments (Gupta & Singh, 2025). These narratives underscore the urgent need for systemic reform encompassing policy enforcement, infrastructure upgrades, teacher capacity building, and community sensitization.

This study aims to explore in detail the multifaceted challenges faced by parents of CWSN in North India with an emphasis on Haryana and Delhi. By integrating quantitative data and qualitative narratives, this research seeks to offer comprehensive insights into barriers to inclusive education and identify pathways to enhance policy implementation and support structures, ultimately facilitating meaningful educational inclusion of children with special needs.

Literature Review

UNESCO conducted a seminal report, based on national analysis across rural migrant households in India which estimated 10.7 million children affected, identified 40% out-of-school risk for seasonal migrants in migration cycle from nov. to june overlap academic from the northern states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan to Gujrat, Maharashtra overlap academic sessions (Jun-Apr), causing 6-month disruptions (UNESCO, 2013). Based on the findings, the study promotes seasonal hostels at worksites schools in different languages which establishes foundational metrics predating UDISE+ critical for migrant-CWSN admission barriers.

A Peer-reviewed study conducted by Bohr(2020) of 150 migrants families majorly construction laborers in Maharashtra focusing on worksites realities and relation to infrastructure and teacher gaps, documents 65% enrollment drop due to mobility, language barrier and stigma Right to education become more blurred twice in case of girls because the role as sibling caregiver.

Rajan (2021) examines the migrants' children's exclusionary schooling experiences in Bengaluru's urban slum through ethnographic narratives primarily from SC/ST background from Bhiarr/MP regions. The study reveals pervasive language barriers, social stigma from teachers/peers, hidden costs (₹ 2,000-5,000 annually) despite the RTE "free education" claims, irregular attendance due to mobility, and policy gaps including NEP 2020's inadequate migrant provisions. Caregivers also expressed concerns about the structural violence rather than blaming parental disinterest.

Vimala and Salini (2023) conducted an empirical survey of over 200 respondents (primarily migrant workers and families from Bihar/UP origins) across Tamil Nadu/Chennai construction sites, finding 68.93% disagreed on Samagra Shiksha's effectiveness for interstate migrants, 85% faced digital exclusion during COVID, and the Unorganized Workers Act remained unimplemented. Out-of-state migrants showed 21% higher dropout rates than locals, validating failures of seasonal camps/free uniforms and strengthening critiques of legal-policy implementation gaps.

Satyarthi Foundation (2022) conducted a primary survey across 54 migrant households (129 children aged 14 years) from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh migrating to Delhi NCR and Bhopal destinations. Findings reveal 40% out-of-school rates, with urban enrollment dropping to 55% and 75% in villages; children under age five exposed to hazardous work sites lacking childcare; and 75% families preferring village hostels over urban alternatives.

Objective

To understand the specific issues and challenges faced by caregivers of Children with special needs from migration background in North India.

Methodology

This study adopts a comprehensive thematic analysis approach of secondary data, leveraging existing quantitative and qualitative datasets to investigate the challenges faced by migrated parents of children with special needs (CWSN) in accessing inclusive education in North India, specifically Haryana, Delhi, Punjab, and UP. This analysis involves peer-reviewed academic articles, Governmental and NGO reports such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) assessments, RPWD Act implementation reviews, and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data focusing on education barriers for caregivers of CWSN in North Indian states.

Findings and Discussion

North India's migrant corridors from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi channel approximately 55 million migrant workers, representing 30% of India's 500 million workforce according to latest government data. (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2025). Among accompanying children estimated at 15-20%, children with special needs (CWSN) at the national 2.21% prevalence rate yield approximately 180,000-240,000 vulnerable children, yet Haryana migrant hotspots report only 0.92% enrollment amid absent infrastructure (UDISE+ Report, 2025).

By analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies, major themes are listed as follow

School Admission and Enrollment Barriers

Among North Indian migrant caregivers (Haryana-UP-Bihar to Delhi NCR/Punjab), 70% report outright CWSN admission denials citing "inadequate facilities" despite RPwD 4% quota (UDISE+ Report, 2025). 40% migrant children entirely out-of-school (Satyarthi Foundation, 2022), with 35% lacking formal access due to identity gaps like birth certificates and residency proof (World Bank, 2023), and 62% missing prior records during 6-9 month seasonal moves; 75% village-stayers attend vs. 55% city-migrants, Aadhaar mismatches cause interstate rejections; (Shah, 2021)

Migrant mothers endure "bureaucratic cruelty" via 15-25 km treks for certificates and forced affidavits waiving liability (Thornton, 2024): "Schools

reject outsiders—our CWSN child ‘spoils others’; continuous moves and no nearby schools keep us out” (Azim Premji University, 2023; Satyarathi Foundation, 2022).

Inadequate School Infrastructure and Resources

.Migrant slums lack basic facilities, with only 54.9 % of schools having ramps, and 35.6% having toilets as per UDISE+ 2024-25 data. Sensory rooms are completely absent at kilns and construction sites where many migrant children live. Nearly 99% of female caregivers surveyed (over 2,500) spend Rs. 15,000-25,000 per child on assistive aids, highlighting significant financial burdens. Destination cities lack adequate support infrastructure, forcing families to spend Rs. 3,000-5,000 monthly on therapy, while daily wages are only Rs. 100-200, creating severe economic strain. (Shah, 2021)

Poor Teacher Training and School Support

60-80% migrant caregivers excluded from IEPs (Thornton, 2024). More than 65% teachers are untrained in CWSN behaviors, compounded by Hindi-Punjabi language barriers for Bihari migrants. (Shah, 2021) 92.95 million migrant children (50.6% girls) receive no tailored support during parental absences Parents serve as “de facto teachers”: “Punjab teachers punish stammering, ignore dialects and no contact during migration. (Singal, 2016; UDISE+ Report, 2025; Satyarathi Foundation, 2022).

Social Stigma and Negative Attitudes

70% migrant CWSN bullied/excluded; female enrollment 42.91% amid “outsider” labels; 53% Muslim migrant caregivers report discrimination, 40% work instead of school per UNESCO . Families conceal needs: “Punjab villages call migrant kids ‘trouble’—girls deemed ‘weak’; safety fears keep children from distant schools, perpetuating intergenerational exclusion” (Satyarathi Foundation, 2022).

Financial and Emotional Burden

40-50% mothers quit jobs (99% primary caregivers); 60% single-earner kiln families, costs consume 50%+ income; 85% COVID exclusion, 15% child labor contribution, 14% sibling care burdens World Bank, 2023). Burnout pervasive is common among migrants such as: “One earner, high bills, no schemes—kids work or mind siblings; we prefer village hostels but lack options, trapping us in poverty” (Satyarathi Foundation, 2022; Thornton, 2024).

Discussion

Findings expose a critical misalignment between RPwD Act 2016 mandates

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and migrant CWSN realities, where admission denials persist despite legal quotas (UDISE+ Report, 2025). This echoes the “free education myth,” where structural barriers like documentation silos exclude Bihari migrants from Punjabi-medium schools, extending rural exclusion to mobile populations. Unlike Kerala’s multilingual successes, northern corridors reveal policy inertia, trapping families in poverty cycles (World Bank, 2023).

Slum infrastructure gaps force private aid spending by female caregivers, mirroring identity-language barriers and worksite enrollment drops. Samagra Shiksha reaches few migrants, contrasting Gujarat’s hostels, while COVID exclusion amplified precarity—Rs. 3K monthly therapy on minimal wages

Peer bullying and untrained teachers (>65%) compound stigma, with female enrollment lags signaling SDG regression. Scheme inefficacy, urging portable records and cultural modules absent in North India.

Conclusion

This synthesis reveals catastrophic policy failure for migrant CWSN caregivers: 40% out-of-school, 70% admission denials, infrastructure voids, untrained teachers, stigma, and caregiver collapse amid 92.95 million affected children Northern corridors lag due to documentation silos, language mismatches, and absent hostels—unlike Rajasthan/Kerala’s successes. Immediate actions: residential CWSN hostels at kiln sites (preferred by 75% families), blockchain portable IEPs, Samagra migrant quotas (Rs. 500cr), cultural training modules. These bridge RTE/RPwD gaps, break intergenerational poverty, and achieve SDG 4.5 for 10 million families.

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