

# GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TOWARDS CHILDREN IN 2021-22



KAILASH SATYARTHI CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION  
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## Introduction

The budgetary allocation made for the welfare of children is an important indicator that can help us to take stock of our development investments for children and identify glaring gaps in resource allocation and utilisation of the same. The Union Budget allows us to look at how the government looks at the welfare of children. It is an important tool to assess, whether the allocations made under different ministries and/or different programmes cater to the needs of the future of our country and ensure their protection.

The percentage share of the Union budget allocated for the welfare of children during the FY 2021-22 reduced to **2.46%** from 3.16% in 2020-21. In the current time when children required more attention than ever, a drastic reduction of 11% is unfair.

### 1. Impact on Implementation of National Child Labour Project (NCLP)

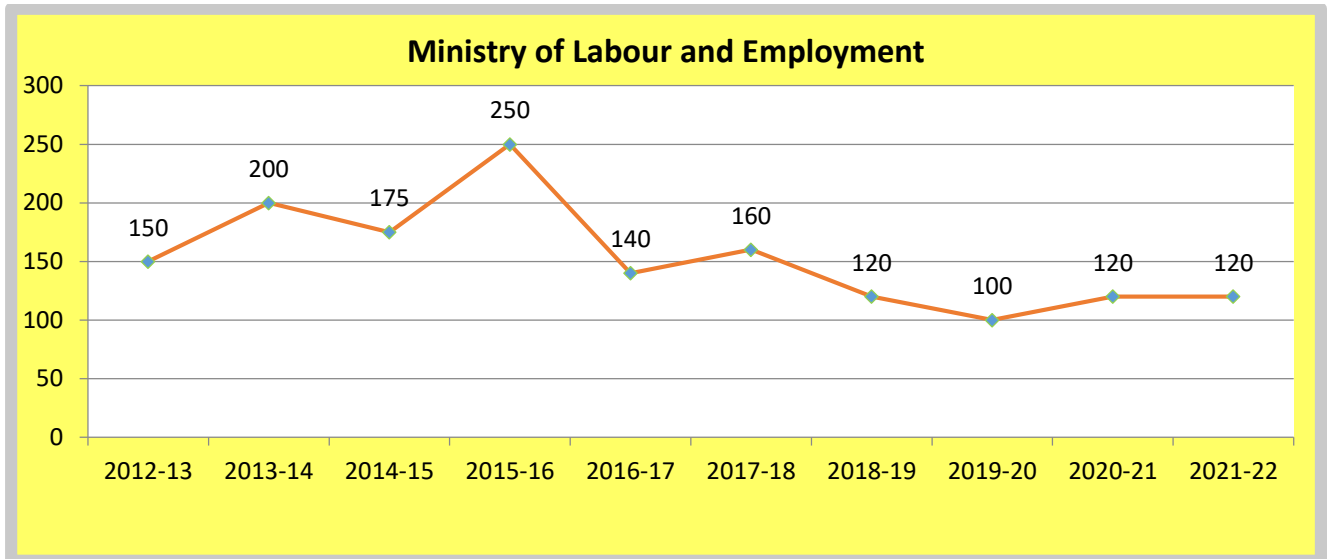
The Union Budget gives us an opportunity to look at how the Government looks at the welfare of children in the labour situation. To address the issue of child labour the *National Child Labour Project Scheme (NCLPS)* was started in 1988 to Identify, withdraw and rehabilitate all children in the Project Area from labour.

With the new law addressing child labour, it is essential to bring resources into place to ensure that we as a society are moving towards ensuring that all children have access to education and are free from the shackles of slavery. The trend of budget allocation under 'National Child Labour Project' (NCLP) highlights a decline of 25% between FY 2016-17 to FY 2021-22 (from INR 160 Cr in FY 2016-17 to INR 120 Cr in FY 2021-22).

From once the NCLP having about 5% share in the total budget of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) budget now reduced to a mere 1%. The allocated budget under

NCLP has been drastically cut by nearly half (52%) since 2015-2016 i.e. (from INR 250 Cr FY 2015-16 to INR 120 Cr to FY 2021-22)

**Figure 1 Budget trends over the past 10 years (2012-13 to 2021-22)**



However, despite substantial budget reductions, the MoLE has been unable to fully utilise the allocated funds under NCLP. This could be due to the poor implementation of the project. As in the FY 2020-21, the budget for NCLP in its RE reduced the budget to 50 Cr which is a reduction of 58% to the allocated budget of 120 Cr, thus indicating under utilisation of funds and further highlighting the poor implementation of NCLP and lack of attention paid to it. However, this is not the only time the allocated budget was under-utilized. In 2015-16, the budget allocated for NCLP was reduced by 60% during RE. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, the budget was reduced by 23% and 36% respectively at the RE stage. In the FY 2018-19, the budget in the RE was reduced to INR 93 Cr as compared to the sanctioned INR 120 Cr (decrease by 23%) and in the FY 2019-20, the RE was reduced to INR 79 Cr (decrease by 21%).

## Expenditure for District project societies (DPS), Special training Centers (STC) and Rehabilitation under NCLP

Under the NCLP, the children in the age group of 9-14 years are rescued/withdrawn from work and enrolled in the NCLP Special Training Centres, where they are provided with bridge education, vocational training, mid-day meal, stipend, health care, etc. before being mainstreamed into the formal education system. The children in the age group of 5-8 years are directly linked to the formal education system through close coordination with the Ministry of Education.

**Table 1 Minimum Annual Budget required under NCLP**

Expenditure Heads*	Per month*	Per Annum	No. of Units	Total
Total Expenditure per DPS (Staff Salaries & Recurring Expenditure)	78,000	936,000	312 (No. of DPS)*	292,032,000
Total Expenditure for per STC (Honorarium for Volunteers & Recurring Expenditure)	27,700	332,400	3,424 (No. of STC)#	113,81,37,600
Stipend for children (Number of children enrolled in STC's as on 2/2/2021 (Pencil Portal))	400	4,800	58,896 (No. of Children)*	282,700,800
<b>Minimum Annual Budget required under NCLP</b>				<b>171,28,70,400</b>

Source: \*Pencil Portal accessed on 2/2/2021; #information published by PIB dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017

The minimum annual budget required to run 312 DPS, 3,424 STC's and Stipend for children have been estimated to be INR 171 Cr. However, only INR 120 Cr. for the FY 2021-22 has been allotted under NCLP.

The Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), a sister organisation of the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF), alone has successfully rescued 1,417 children from bondage in the current financial year i.e. 2020-21 (Rescued between 01/04/2020 to 20/01/2021). With the assumption that all these child bonded labourers are special category beneficiaries (such as children including orphans or those rescued from organized & forced begging rings or other forms of forced child labour, and women) with an entitlement of INR 2,00,000, the total budgetary requirement to rehabilitate them is INR 28.3 Cr (1,417 child victims @ INR 2.0 lakh financial assistance for rehabilitation per victim). This is the amount required for rehabilitating children rescued by BBA alone. This amount will increase many folds as the rescue of bonded labourers are taking place across the country by several organisations and Government agencies.

Since the budget head of the National Child Labour Project (NCLP), also includes grants-in-aid to voluntary agencies and reimbursement of assistance to bonded labour it appears impossible to provide any assistance to the victims of bonded labour in the FY 2021-22 as the allocation is grossly inadequate even to maintain the fixed expenditure under NCLP. The total budget required for maintenance of existing institutions and providing financial assistance for rehabilitation of the child bonded labourers rescued by BBA alone has been estimated to INR 199.6 Cr.

## **2. Child Protection Services**

Child protection services (CPS) cater to children who are either victims of abuse and exploitation or are likely to fall out of the safety net of society. It is the flagship scheme of the Government of India to cater to the protection needs of children. All rescued children from exploitative labour, trafficking, abuse, early marriage etc. are provided protection services under the CPS. This scheme also provides funds for the running of institutions set up under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

NCRB annual publication Crime in India shows that the crimes of sexual abuse and exploitation of children are on the increase. The vulnerabilities of families and children have gone up further due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Thus the CPS has become all the more important today.

In the current year's budget, the Child Protection Services has been merged in a new programme under the MWCD named Vatsalya Mission. In this programme besides the CPS, Child Welfare Services have also been merged. On the other hand, the allocation for the Vatsalya Mission is INR 900 Cr against the allocation of INR 1500 Cr for CPS alone in FY 2020-21. This reduction is also likely to affect various child protection services which the State provides adversely.

### **3. Impact on School Education Programmes**

The Department of School Education & Literacy in the Ministry of Education, the erstwhile Ministry of Human Resource Development, is responsible for the development of school education and literacy in the country and focuses on universalisation of education. The budget allocated to the Ministry for the welfare of children in FY 2021-22 has been reduced by 10% as compared to the allocation made in FY 2020-21.

The Government of India in 2018 had taken a key step in The Department of School Education & Literacy and launched the '*Samagra Shiksha*' (SS) which subsumed the '*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*', '*Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)*' and '*Teacher Education (TE)*' programme. The SSA was covering only 19% (6-14 years) of the total population of India whereas the new '*Samagra Shiksha*' intends to cover 34% (3-18 years) of the total population. While the coverage was almost doubled yet the budgetary allocation made for the implementation of '*Samagra Shiksha*' programme was not in the same proportion. In FY 2021-22, the funds' allocation has decreased by 20% (decreased

from INR 38,751 Cr. in FY 2020-21 to INR 31,050 Cr in FY 2021-22). This reduction in funds allocation will affect the children from poor families who solely depend on Govt. schools. At the time when the country is struggling to provide quality education to all children especially those who are studying in Govt. schools, this reduction will downgrade the quality of education further instead of improvement.

In absence of sufficient funds, the '*Teacher Education (TE)*' programme is also likely to suffer which is one of the most crucial components to ensure quality education to children.

Further, with this minimal budgetary allocation achieving the goals set under the National Education Policy, 2020 of providing quality education to children starting from pre-school appears to be unachievable. All these aspects together will bear a long term impact on the education system as the children pass-out ultimately will have a very poor level of knowledge with lack of understanding and could not be employable.

#### **4. Impact on Programmes relating to Nutrition of Children**

With the aim at improving the nutritional level among the children by way of providing nutritional food Govt. of India run three major schemes, (1) Anganwadi Services and (2) National Nutrition Mission, schemes run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to ensure improved nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years; (3) Mid-Day Meal scheme implemented by the Ministry of Education with one of its aim to improve nutritional level among the children by the way of providing nutritional food.



Two of the major schemes run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development have been discontinued and merged into a newly introduced scheme called 'Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0' with a budget cut of 18%.

In the current financial year (2020-21) when the country was affected by the COVID, 19 pandemic and crores of poor families with small children ran out of food grains and faced an acute food shortage the Govt. could not even utilize the funds allocated under the scheme 'Anganwadi Services' as a result the budget was cut by 16% (3,181 Cr.) at the stage of Revised Estimates.

Underutilization of funds also observed in the National Nutrition Mission scheme which was launched in 2018 in addition to the existing schemes aiming at reduction in the levels of malnutrition among women and children. As a result, the scheme suffered a huge budget cut of 84% in the FY 2020-21 (reduced from 3,700 Cr. in the BE of FY 2020-21 to 600 Cr. RE of FY 2020-21).

Besides these, the allocation of funds under the Mid-Day Meal scheme shows an unusual trend. In the current financial year when schools are closed across the country due to the COVID, 19 pandemic and the Mid-Day meal programme was discontinued for a large part of the year, the funds allocated was revised to 12,900 Cr. with an increase of 17% against the allocation made during the budget estimates. However, in the proposed budget for the FY 2021-22 when the schools are likely to open and resume classes only 11,500 Cr. has been allocated. More importantly, it needs to be mentioned here that one of the core objectives of the Mid-day meal scheme is to enhance enrolment, retention and attendance of children in the school. Studies have already shown that chance of drop out of school has increased due to the pandemic and the lockdown. In such a situation low budget allocation for the Mid-day meal scheme is going to be a major challenge in the coming days.

**Table 2 Funds allocated under different schemes to improve the nutritional level among children**

Name of the Scheme	FY 2020-21		FY 2021-22 Budget Estimate (in Cr.)	% Change in allocation in FY 2021-22 over FY 2020-21 (in Cr.)
	Budget Estimate (in Cr.)	Revised Estimate (in Cr.)		
Anganwadi Services	19,916	16,735	-	-
National Nutrition Mission	3,700	600	-	-
Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0	-	-	19,413	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,616</b>	<b>17,335</b>	<b>19,413</b>	<b>-18%</b>
Mid-Day Meal scheme	11,000	12,900	11,500	5%

The institutions which are meant to provide pre-school education and improve the nutritional level among the children suffered a major budget cut. With such a reduced budget it is just not possible for the institutions to fulfil their core objectives.

## 5. Recommendations

1. **Increase budget allocation for NCLP:** Rescue of children from labour and their rehabilitation must be a priority and it cannot be allowed to suffer because of continued underutilization of fund and poor implementation of the National Child Labour Project (NCLP). While preparing budget/allocating fund for NCLP, considerations of its key components such as minimum annual expenditure required to run the existing institutions such as DPS, STCs and Stipend for children under the scheme should never be ignored. Accordingly, budget allocation for NCLP needs to be increased from the current INR 120 Cr. to at least INR 200 Cr., which is the minimum annual expenditure estimated to run the existing institutions under the project, stipend for children and rehabilitation of children rescued from bonded labour.

Besides this, the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation also urges the programme implementers and administrators to conduct a thorough review of the NCL project on a regular basis and ensure its proper implementation as underutilization of funds in every financial year has become a regular feature.

2. **Prioritise child protection in budget allocation:** The allocation for the Vatsalya Mission at INR 900 Cr in FY 201-22, which includes allocations for both Child Protection Services (CPS) and Child Welfare Services, is 40% lower than the allocation of INR 1500 Cr for CPS alone in FY 2020-21. This huge reduction is likely to adversely impact various child protection services being provided by the government. KSCF believes that the protection of children must be prioritized in terms of greater resource allocation in the Union Budget.
3. **School education demands greater allocation:** The 20% reduction in budget allocation to Samagra Shiksha programme in FY 2021-22 is rather unfortunate, whatever be the constraint. There cannot be any compromise with the education of children. If the government intends to revive public education and universalise school education, the budget allocation to Samagra Shiksha be reviewed, especially in the backdrop of the National Education Policy 2020 which proposes a massive restructuring of the education landscape. Moreover, to fill gaps across the areas of education infrastructure, learning, and education financing, the budget must provide an allocation of at least 6% of the domestic product (GDP) on education, as promised in the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.
4. **Nutritional needs of children require more attention:** In the backdrop of COVID-19, the nutritional needs of children require more attention and even the Supreme Court of India has made a similar observation. NFHS findings have also shown that

child nutrition levels in India have worsened over the last five years. Therefore, budget allocation for 'Saksham Anganwadis & Poshan 2.0' in the current budget, which is less than the allocation for ICDS alone last year, be substantially revised upwards to meet the nutritional needs of children as well as pregnant women and lactating mothers.

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