



DPIO Vyas/Oct.51,A19c. "Fighting Food Distress in South India". Distribution of rice gruel to hungry children at a food relief centre. Public Resource via Internet Archive

The Welfare State at Lunch: India's School Mid-Day Meal Programme

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) — a programme started by a single municipal corporation in 1920, is India's most enduring and wide-reaching social welfare interventions today.. The MDMS addresses the crucial intersection of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and primary education by currently providing cooked meals to over eleven crore children in approximately twelve lakh schools nationwide. Its impact can be captured via two crucial material outcomes. Hot cooked meals are a significant factor in boosting enrolment and attendance rates especially for girls and children from marginalised communities who would otherwise not be able to attend school. It reduces women's burden of unpaid care work. It has been an instrumental scheme which has had a tangible effect over the progress of Indian society.

CHAPTER 06

The Welfare State at Lunch: India's School Mid-Day Meal Programme

Dipa Sinha and Bhargav B S

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)¹ implemented in government schools across India is one of the country's most enduring and wide-reaching social welfare interventions. Often cited as a successful initiative of the Government of India, the programme currently provides cooked meals to over eleven crore children in approximately twelve lakh schools nationwide. Empirical evidence indicates that the scheme has contributed significantly to mitigating classroom hunger, enhancing school enrolment and retention, improving nutritional outcomes, and expanding economic opportunities for women, particularly from marginalised communities. It has also served as an instrument for fostering social inclusion and equity. Nevertheless, concerns persist that the scheme's design and implementation frameworks have remained largely static, limiting their responsiveness to evolving socio-economic contexts and nutritional challenges. This chapter traces the historical evolution of the programme, analyses its current status and identifies critical issues that warrant policy attention and reform.

¹ We use 'MDMS' throughout this chapter. The scheme is now called PM POSHAN but this is a recent change; the relevant literature predominantly uses 'MDMS'.

6.1 Tracing India's mid-day meal journey

The first known programme to distribute food to school children was introduced in 1920 by the Madras Municipal Corporation. The chief minister of Tamil Nadu, K. Kamraj is credited with expanding the mid-day meal scheme in the state between 1955 to 1961 as part of the measures undertaken by the state government to expand school education. While it was a popular scheme, it was not universal and depended extensively on voluntary donations and philanthropic initiatives. In 1982, chief minister M.G. Ramachandran expanded noon meals to primary school children and institutionalised the scheme. A few other states such as Gujarat, Kerala and Puducherry also introduced mid-day meal programmes for government school children in the 1980s. By the early 1990s, over fifteen states had some scheme through which meals were served to children in government schools (not necessarily all schools) (see MDMS Guidelines 2006). Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh had state government schemes. While Karnataka, Odisha and West Bengal implemented the scheme with a combination of state resources and international funding, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan implemented it solely through international assistance.

The government of India piloted the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) as a centrally sponsored scheme in 1995 in 2,408 blocks, later expanding it to the entire country in 1997–98 (see MDMS Guidelines 2006). The NP-NSPE only provided dry rations (in the form of rice or wheat) to be distributed in schools. Many state governments passed on the dry rations (3 kg a month per student) while others added their own contributions to provide a hot cooked meal. Dry rations distributed once a month did not contribute much to benefits such as increasing enrolment and attendance in schools. Provision of hot cooked meals to all children across government schools was introduced following the Supreme Court's orders in 2001.

In the 'Right to Food case' (PUCL v. Union of India, CWP No. 196/2001) the Supreme Court in November 2001 directed all the states to *'implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every government and government assisted primary school with a prepared mid-day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein, each day of school for a minimum of 200 days (a year).'* Despite this order, it was found that several states continued to provide only dry rations until the Government of India revised the national scheme in 2004 to provide a share of the cooking costs (to meet the expenses of fuel and other ingredients) along with free provision of rice/wheat. Under the scheme it was mandatory to provide hot cooked meals in government schools. The 2004 scheme also put in guidelines for menus, payment of cooks and helpers, kitchen and storage infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation. In accordance with the

ANECDOTE

The Question That Sparked it All

During a visit to the town of Cheranmahadevi in Tirunelveli district in the early 1960s, Kamaraj noticed a boy tending to cattle at a railway crossing. He then inquired why the boy was not in school instead. It is worth noting here that this Tirunelveli district experienced an unprecedented amount of rainfall within just two days in the second week of December, a phenomenon that is not typical for the entire year, resulting in significant disruption.

In response to Kamaraj's question, the boy posed a counter question: *'If I go to school, will you give me food to eat? I can learn only if I eat.'*

These words from the boy inspired Kamaraj to develop what would later become a unique initiative aimed at encouraging children to engage in their studies in primary schools nationwide – the mid-day meal program.

Source: https://www.news18.com/education-career/if-i-go-to-school-will-you-give-me-food-the-question-that-launched-mid-day-meal-scheme-in-india-ws-ab-9210726.html?utm_source=copy_share&utm_medium=clipboard&utm_campaign=clipnshare

Supreme Court's orders the scheme also recommended that priority should be given to women belonging to scheduled castes(SCs), scheduled tribes(STs) and other backward classes(OBCs) while appointing mid-day meal cooks and helpers. In drought-affected areas, the meal was to be provided during summer holidays as well. While the scheme was initially aimed at children in Classes 1 to 5,, it was expanded up to Class 8 in April 2008.

Section 5(1)(b) of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 includes an entitlement of a free meal for all school children in the age group of 6 to 14 years (children from Classes 1 to 8). With the passing of this legislation, the school meal is now a legal entitlement for all children in primary and elementary government schools. In 2021, the scheme was rechristened as the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) and extended to children studying in Bal Vatikas or pre-primary classes in government and government-aided schools.

A Brief History of Mid-Day Meals in India

1920

Madras Municipal corporation introduces meals in the city's schools.

1955

Chief Minister Kamraj expands it to Tamil Nadu's government schools (not universal yet).

1982

Chief Minister MG Ramachandran institutionalises the scheme and makes it universal in Tamil Nadu's government primary schools.



1980s

Gujarat, Kerala and Pondicherry introduce mid-day meals in primary schools.

1990s

15 states in India implement the MDMS in various forms.



1995

National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) piloted as a centrally sponsored scheme by the Government of India.

1997-98

NP-NSPE expanded to the entire country.



2001

Supreme Court directs all state governments to provide hot cooked meals in primary schools in the PUCL v. Union of India (Right to Food) case.

2004

Scheme revised to provide more central funds for implementation in all states.

2008

MDMS expanded to upper primary schools (upto Class 8).

2013

National Food Security Act 2013

6.2 Impact of MDMS

Across the globe, there is both recognition of the need for and evidence of the benefits of school meals (see for instance, [Berlanga 2022](#); [Beltrami 2025](#)). When school meals are provided, the opportunity cost of forgoing wage work for children in low-income households is addressed. It strikes at the heart of hunger for many households who worry about providing food for their children. Not just basic hunger, nutrition is also taken care of where there are regulations for protein and calorie requirements for each meal. Hunger addresses survival and nutrition addresses child development. The two factors combined boost school attendance, especially for girls ([Berlanga 2022](#)). School meals fall at the crucial intersection of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and primary education and acting on these issues via the provision of school meals addresses several dimensions of precarity ([Anand et al. 2012](#); [Cohen et al. 2021, 2023](#)).

Several studies have been conducted in India, especially in the initial years after the universalisation of MDMS following the Supreme Court's orders, evaluating the impact of the MDMS on different aspects of child development. These show that there was an increase in enrolment and attendance with the introduction of school meals ([Afridi 2005](#); [Drèze and Goyal 2003](#); [Khera 2006](#)), especially for a large number of girls and children from marginalised communities who were previously not in schools began entering schools ([Drèze and Goyal 2003](#)). In addition, having a cooked meal provided in schools meant that mothers could go to work without worrying about their children's lunch. They saved time in cooking without leaving work and returning home in the middle of the day. The scheme also creates employment for women who are hired to cook meals in the schools with 24.53 lakh cooks and helpers currently engaged in the programme. Some states like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat also have a separate cadre of noon-meal organisers, cooks and cook assistants to help with the logistics and monitoring of the scheme.

[Chakrabarti et al. \(2021\)](#) report that MDMS has intergenerational nutritional benefits, i.e., children born to mothers who accessed MDM had better growth (height-to-age ratio) than those children whose mothers were not exposed to the mid-day meal scheme. This positive effect was especially evident among families who belonged to lower socio-economic strata. Hence, MDMS has come to be a crucial scheme for children's education and nutrition over the past three decades.

The above findings—positive effects on enrolment (particularly girls), employment and relief to mothers, nutrition, protection against hunger, are reinforced by recent studies such as [Kaur \(2021\)](#) and [Paltasingh and Bhue \(2022\)](#) as well. The MDMS is widely acknowledged for its comprehensive benefits to childhood development and education. Yet, there are certain concerns about its imple-

mentation and recent performance. In the following sections we discuss the design, implementation status and critical issues requiring further research and policy action.

6.3 MDMS in India: Design, status and implementation

To assess the current status of MDMS, we use the data available from the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B) documents that state governments submit to the Union government every financial year. However, while all the detailed AWP&B documents are available on the website until the year 2021–22, for the last few years only the final minutes have been uploaded. Hence, for most of the analysis, the data pertain to 2021–22 and, where possible, the latest situation is presented. The list of data used is given in Annexure 1.

6.3.1 Universal coverage

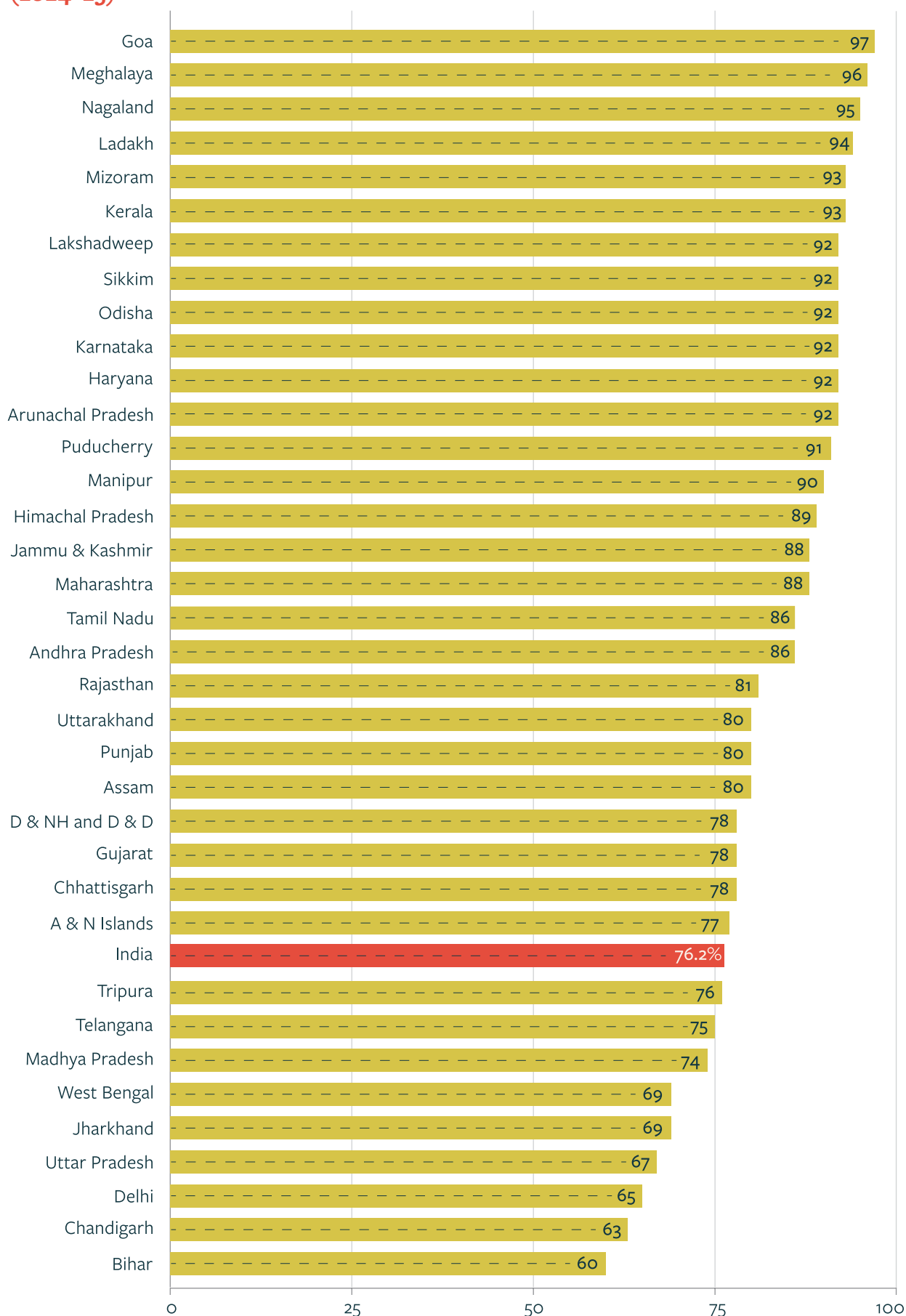
According to the NFSA, as well as the Supreme Court's orders, MDMS is supposed to cover all government and government-aided schools and all children enrolled in these schools. Based on data for 2024–25 as given in the AWP&B documents, there is a gap between the number of children enrolled in schools and the number of children proposed to be covered under the mid-day meal scheme. Further, there is also a gap between the number of children approved for mid-day meals by the Programme Approval Board (PAB) based on these proposals and the average number of children availing meals.² About 82 per cent of enrolled children are approved by PAB and the average number of children who availed meals is 92.8 per cent of the number approved (76.2 per cent of the number of children enrolled). While the latter is probably a reflection of school attendance, it is not clear why there is such a large gap between approval and enrollment. We also track this data from 2021–22 to 2024–25 in Annexure 12.

As seen in Figure 6.1, the gap also varies by state with Bihar (60 per cent), Delhi (65 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (67 per cent), Jharkhand (69 per cent) and West Bengal (69 per cent) having the lowest percentage of enrolled students availing MDMS. On the other hand, Goa (97 per cent), Meghalaya (96 per cent), Nagaland (95 per cent), Mizoram (93 per cent) and Kerala (93 per cent) have the highest coverage in terms of enrolled students availing MDMS.

Another relevant issue is the trends in coverage. There has been some concern regarding the closure of government schools and a shift in the composition of school attendance towards private schools (Maurya 2025a; Kingdon 2020).

² Number of enrolled students refers to all students enrolled in classes I to VIII for the academic year (in real time). The PAB-approved number of children refers to the number sanctioned by the PAB for the MDMS for fund allocation and provision of meals. The average number of children availing meals is the average daily count of those children who have been served the MDM.

Figure 6.1: Average percentage of students availing meals vis-à-vis enrolment (2024-25)



Source: Mid-Day Meal PAB Minutes 2025-26

Unified District Information System for Education Plus (U-DISE+) data show that the number of government schools decreased from 10.32 lakh in 2020–21 to 10.13 lakh in 2024–25 (1.8 per cent drop) and government-aided schools decreased from

Rights-holders

All children in primary and elementary government schools

Minimum entitlements

Primary: 450 calories and 12 gm of protein

Upper Primary: 700 Calories and 20 gm of protein

Eligibility criteria

None, the scheme is universal

Year of introduction

1995

Why this scheme?

Comprehensive benefits to child development and education

84.3 thousand in 2020–21 to 79.3 thousand in 2024–25 (5.9 per cent drop) (Maurya 2025b). According to the Ministry of Education's (MoE) reply to a Rajya Sabha question (asked by MP Sanjay Singh, dated 17 December 2025), the number of schools covered under the MDMS (PM POSHAN) declined from 11.19 lakh in 2020–21 to 10.35 lakh in 2024–25 — an overall decrease of 84,453 schools or 7.5 per cent over a five-year period. Of all the states, Uttar Pradesh (1.67 lakh in 2020–21 to 1.41 lakh in 2024–25), Madhya Pradesh (1.12 lakh in 2020–21 to 88.2 thousand in 2024–25) and Assam (53.4 thousand in 2020–21 to 44.1 thousand in 2024–25) saw the biggest decline in MDMS school coverage (Maurya 2025b). Although further data, especially age-wise population figures are required to appropriately analyse the underlying reasons for this shift, it is observed that the reduction in the number of schools is higher in poorer states, which probably require the scheme the most.

Data from the annual reports of the Ministry of Education show a decline in the number of children being covered between 2014 and 2020 from 10.22 crore to 9.01 crore. Further, data from

the U-DISE+ on school enrolment also show a decline in the number of children enrolled in government and government-aided schools (Classes 1–8) from 11.63 crore in 2018–19 to 10.27 crore in 2024–25 (Table 6.1). With the available data, it is difficult to pinpoint whether this is because of a shift of children to private schools or a reduction in the number of children in this age group.

In the year 2020–21, there was an increase in the average number of children availing MDM to 11.8 crore. It is noted that during the pandemic, schools were closed and a food security allowance (FSA) was provided to children in lieu of the mid-day meal scheme. The FSA was given in the form of cash or dry rations varying from state to state. It is possible that since the FSA was not dependent on attendance rates, the improvement observed in 2020–21 reflects this difference.

There is a discrepancy in the data reported for the average number of students availing mid-day meals that requires clarification. Each annual report provides data for a few of the preceding years. As observed in reports up to

Table 6.1 : U-DISE enrolment versus. MDM availment (in crore)

Year	Number of children enrolled in government + aided schools (Classes 1-8) *U-DISE	Average number of children availing mid-day meal (in crore) *MoE annual reports	Average number of children availing mid-day meal *MoE annual reports (new series based on PM POSHAN)
2018–19	11.63	9.12	12.03
2019–20	11.50	9.01	11.98
2020–21	11.73	11.8	11.8
2021–22	12.39	NA	12.21
2022–23	11.75	NA	12.16
2023–24	10.91	NA	11.65
2024–25	10.27	NA	Yet to be reported

Sources and notes: All figures in crores. Distribution of Schools, Enrolments and Teachers by School Category, U-DISE Annual Reports (<https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/#>)(various years) and National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools Major Findings, Ministry of Education Annual Reports (https://www.education.gov.in/documents_reports_hi)(various years)

2021–22, the average number of children availing meals in 2018–19 was 9.12 crore and in 2019–20 it was 9.01 crore. However, in the reports for 2022–23 and 2023–24, the corresponding figures for 2018–19 and 2019–20 are reported as 12.03 crore and 11.98 crore respectively — reflecting an increase of almost 3 crore children. These latter reports do not present figures for years prior to 2018–19. While the reports do not provide any explanation for this, in 2021 the national mid-day meal scheme was modified into the PM POSHAN scheme which expanded coverage to include children in pre-schools and Bal Vatikas. There is a possibility that the data for the previous years were also adjusted to reflect these classes to make it more comparable. The revised data is presented in the last column in Table 6.1.

While there are data gaps and further in-depth studies are required to understand some of these, it is evident that coverage of mid-day meals remains below universal levels. Although reasons are not discussed, the minutes of the PAB meetings acknowledge the gap between enrolment and average number of children availing meals. The minutes note that reasons must be ascertained and efforts undertaken to improve coverage. For example, the 2025-26 Andhra Pradesh minutes record that the Secretary, School Education observed that *‘less than 75% coverage of enrolled students in Upper-Primary in districts viz. Alluri Sitaram Raju, Kurnool, Prakasam, Kakinada, West Godavari, Bapatla, Tirupathi, NTR and Palnadu. He advised the State to ascertain the reasons for this low coverage and take corrective measures.’* To study this further, factors such as the shift in enrolment to private

Table 6.2: Expenditure sharing pattern

100% central assistance	Shared between centre and the states/union territories
1. Cost of food grains	1. Cooking cost
2. Transportation assistance	2. Honorarium to cook-cum-helpers
3. Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (MME)	3. Construction of kitchen-cum-stores
	4. Kitchen devices
	5. Repair of kitchen-cum-stores

* For each of these the Government of India sets the norms which are to be followed in accordance with the sharing ratios given below. State governments are required to allocate the minimum as given by these norms, and are allowed to spend above the norm from their own revenues if they choose to.

Cost-sharing norms for shared expenditure items

Region	Centre : state ratio
North eastern region, Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and union territory of Jammu and Kashmir	90:10
Union territories without legislature	100% centre
All other states and union territories with legislature—Delhi and Puducherry	60:40

Source: Guidelines of Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti (PM POSHAN) Scheme 2022 (Guidelines, PM Poshan Website; <https://pmposhan.education.gov.in/>.)

schools, overall decline in enrolment due to demographic changes, inflated enrolment figures, low attendance rates, and children refusing to eat mid-day meals have to be analysed.

6.3.2 Budgets and allocations

The budgets allocated to the scheme are another indicator of coverage and quality. Certain expenditures related to the scheme — such as foodgrains — are completely borne by the Union government, whereas others, such as cooking costs, are shared by the centre and states. The union government specifies norms from time to time through national guidelines. Table 6.2 gives details of the cost norms under PM POSHAN.

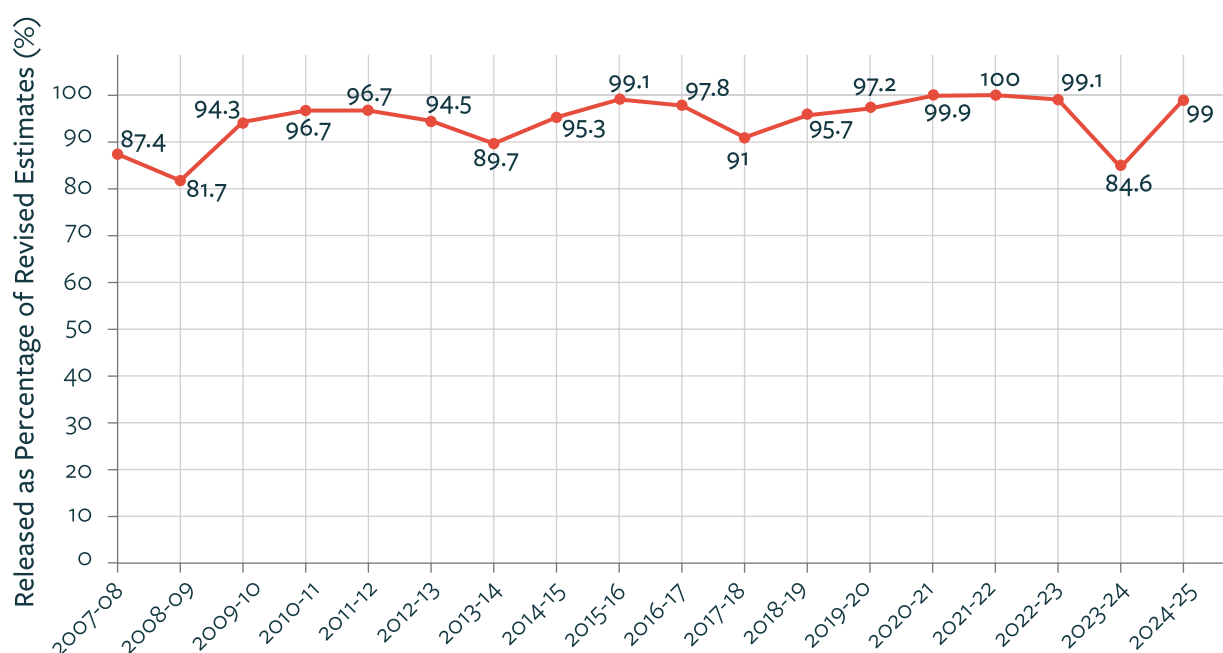
The total allocation for the scheme by the union government is available in the Union budget documents. In absolute terms, the allocation has increased

from ₹7,328 crore in 2007–08 to ₹11,937 crore in 2012–13 and ₹12,467.39 crore in 2024–25. Adjusting for inflation, the budgetary allocations have in fact reduced in real terms. This trend of reducing budget in real terms has been especially observed since 2015. In real terms, budget allocations for the MDMS have reduced by over 41 per cent between 2012 and 2025 (Table 6.3).

To check how much of this trend can be explained by a change in cost-sharing norms between the Centre and the states from 75:25 to 60:40 in 2015 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2015), we posit the total MDM budget including the state share, assuming these norms as the basis for central allocations in Table 6.3 (taking the Union budget as 75 per cent of the total until 2015 and 60 per cent thereafter). While some states contribute more, this gives an estimate of the trends in the central share. As can be seen, even after accounting for the changed cost-sharing norms, the Union budget has reduced in real terms between 2012 and 2024 by about 27 per cent. With budgets reducing in real terms, one can only conclude that the quality and/or the regularity of the meals has deteriorated over time.

A further issue is that not all the budget that is allocated has been released, so the expenditure is even lower than the allocation. While we see the lowest percentage of actual expenditure to budget estimates in the last two years of 2023–24 (72.91 per cent) and 2024–25 (79.39 per cent), the highest was in 2020–21 and 2022–23. The reasons for underutilization need to be further analysed. The Parliamentary Standing Committee in its report also acknowledges this problem of

Figure 6.2: MDM Union budget: Released funds as percentage of revised estimates



Source: Union Budgetary Allocation, PM POSHAN Website

Table 6.3: MDM Union budget allocation and expenditure

Financial year	Union budget, budget estimates (in ₹ crore)	Union budget, budget estimates in real terms (in ₹ crore)*	Price deflator	Estimate of Centre + state budget on the basis of Centre share according to norms (in ₹ crore)	Total estimated budget (Centre + states) in real terms (in ₹ crore)
2024-25	12,467	6,956	1.79	20,779	11,594
2023-24	11,600	6,587	1.76	19,333	10,979
2022-23	10,234	6,317	1.62	17,056	10,529
2021-22	11,500	7,371	1.56	19,166	12,286
2020-21	11,000	7,637	1.44	18,333	12,728
2019-20	11,000	7,786	1.41	18,333	12,978
2018-19	10,500	7,514	1.40	17,500	12,524
2017-18	10,000	7,357	1.36	16,666	12,262
2016-17	9,700	7,180	1.35	16,166	11,966
2015-16	9,236	7,274	1.27	15,394	12,124
2014-15	13,215	10,939	1.21	17,620	14,586
2013-14	13,215	11,947	1.11	17,620	15,929
2012-13	11,937	11,937	1.00	15,916	15,916

Sources and notes: Union Budgetary Allocation, PM POSHAN Website (<https://pmposhan.education.gov.in/>) and Annual Inflation Rates Current Series (Base 2012), Consumer Price Index, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (https://www.cpi.mospi.gov.in/Inflation_CurrentSeries_2012.aspx).

* Real terms calculated 2012-13 onwards using Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) inflation rates with 2012 as base year.³

underutilisation and states, ‘The Committee expresses its concern over the poor fiscal management and under utilization of allocated funds under various flagship schemes of the Department like SSA, PM-POSHAN, NILP, STARS and PM SHRI. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Department should take pro active and effective measures to utilize the funds allocated under BE 2025-26 for these Centrally Sponsored Schemes, so that the benefits are percolated down to the target groups.’ (Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women, Children, Youth and Sports 2025).

Cooking cost norms should be sufficient and reflect market prices if they are able to meet the nutritional guidelines set by the NFSA and PM POSHAN guidelines. While a proper assessment would require looking at the menus and costing

³ Real Terms = Nominal Terms ÷ Price Deflator

them, one way to assess the adequacy of the cooking costs is to check whether they have at least kept pace with inflation. The national guidelines suggest an annual inflation adjustment to the norms — this is a positive aspect of the MDMS as most schemes do not have such an inflation adjustment built in. However, the data show that there are some gaps in implementing this norm. Between 2012 and 2025, there have been a few years when these norms were not updated. Such delays can affect the quality of food in the interim period.

Further, it appears that the inflation adjustment is not made taking into account the actual inflation rates. We estimate the cost norms taking into account the CFPI, and find that although the per capita cost norms have more or less kept pace with food inflation rates, there are still questions over whether the cost norms are sufficient to meet the quality, energy and nutritional needs of children. For instance, ground reportage as recent as July 2025 indicates that administrators in Maharashtra are considering scrapping the provision of eggs, and schools in Kerala are having to pitch in their own money to fund the MDM programme ([Narayanan and Shekhar 2025](#)). [Sahu \(2025\)](#) reports that inflation puts a strain on the implementation of MDMS in Odisha.

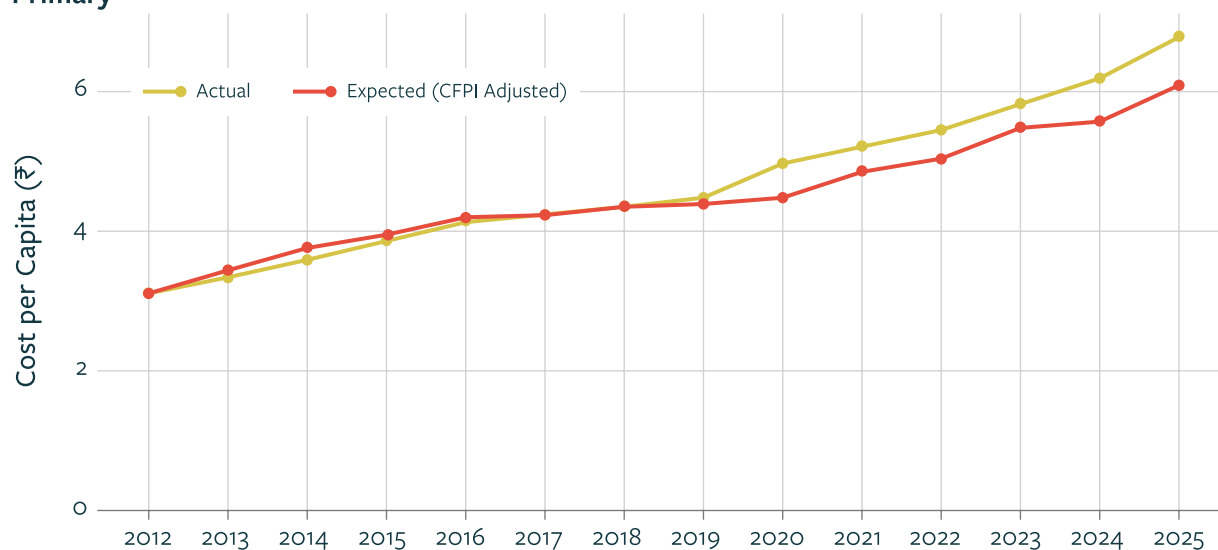
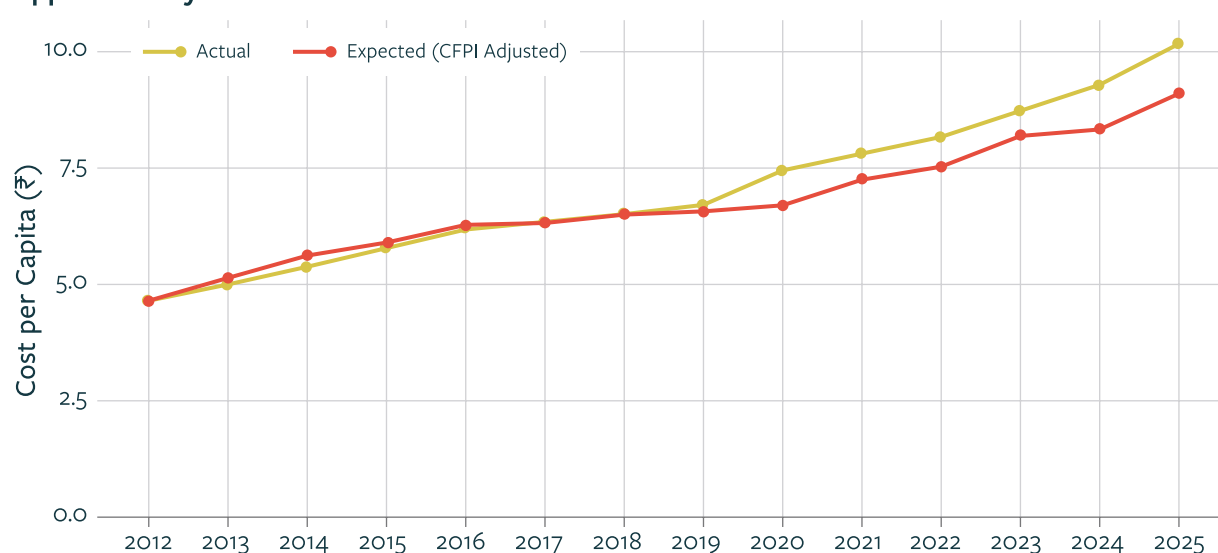
Cooking cost norms: 2012–2025

Figure 6.3 shows the change in actual cooking cost norms versus expected cost norms adjusted for CFPI inflation rates with 2012 as the base year.

Figure 6.4 shows the per meal cost in terms of actual utilisation for the latest available normal year, 2019–20 (pre-Covid). As per the cooking cost norms, primary per capita meal expenditure should have been ₹4.97 and upper-primary ₹7.45. However, some states are spending either less than ₹4.97 or more than ₹7.45. We have highlighted states with either very low per meal cost ($< ₹4$) or very high per meal cost ($> ₹10$). We highlight Gujarat and Mizoram (low).

Many field reports suggest that the quality of meals provided are poor and lack variety and this is attributed to a large extent to the unavailability of resources. For instance, the [National Egg Coordination Committee](#) suggests current egg prices to be between ₹5.5–6.5 depending on the city. Almost all of the primary school cooking cost and a bulk of the upper-primary school cooking cost is taken up by the egg if a state were to provide one egg per day to meet the protein requirement per meal.

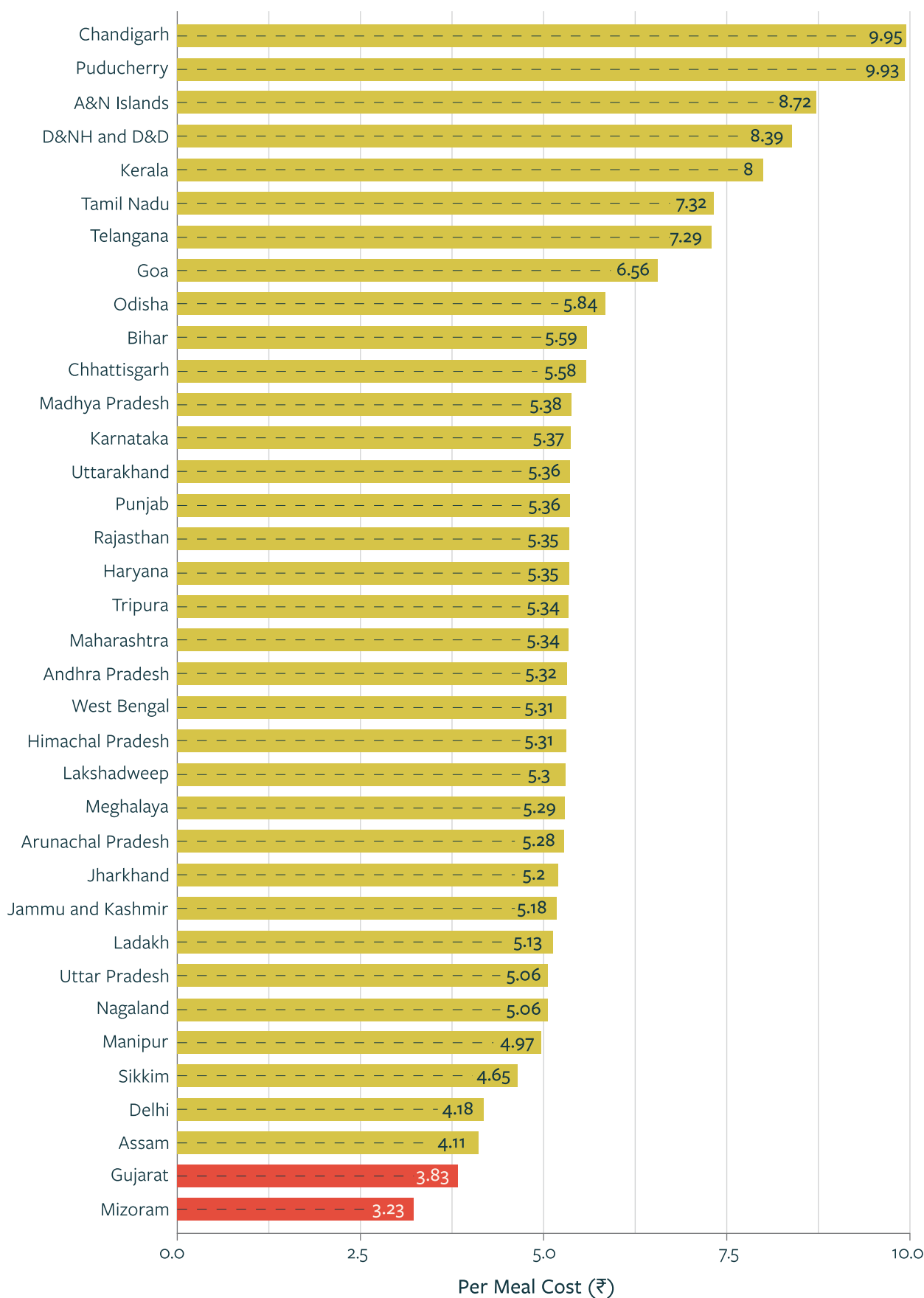
Several states also provide additional contribution in terms of per capita costs (Table 6.4). Recent news reports indicate that Telangana and Odisha are also making additional contributions, beyond the norms ([Sahu 2025](#); [The Hindu 2025](#)).

Figure 6.3: MDM cooking cost norms: Actual versus expected (CFPI adjusted)**Primary****Upper Primary**

Sources and notes: Meal Provision, PM POSHAN Website and Inflation Rates Current Series (Base 2012), Consumer Price Index, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

2013 CFPI Inflation Rate is 'Food and Beverages' since there was no CFPI reported for the year. All inflation rates correspond to the April month of each year.

Figure 6.4: Per meal cost by State: 2019-20 actual utilisation



Source: State Factsheets, Mid-Day Meal PAB-Meetings, 2020-21, PM Poshan Website (<https://pmposhan.education.gov.in/>)

Table 6.4 : Additional per capita contributions: Latest available data (2023)

State	Additional Funds	Source of Additional Funds
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	₹6/child/day	UT grant
Andhra Pradesh	Egg; ₹5.50 & Chikki ₹1.98, Total; ₹7.48 child/day; Cooking cost: Primary ₹0.40, Upper Primary ₹0.43/child/day	State fund
Bihar	₹6/child/week	State fund
Chhattisgarh	₹0.24/child/day for Primary; Soya chikki provided to Primary and Upper Primary children in 7–8 districts	State fund, Flexi fund
Goa	Primary ₹2.55/child/day; Upper Primary ₹1.83/child/day	State fund
Gujarat	₹0.58 Balvatika & Primary/child/day; ₹0.30 Upper Primary/child/day	State fund
Haryana	₹6.40/child/day	State fund
Jharkhand	₹6 per child 2 days a week	State fund
Karnataka	Hot milk for Classes 1–10 at ₹6.26/child/day for 5 days under Ksheera Bhagya Yojana; Egg to Classes 1–8 in 8 Kalyana Karnataka districts at ₹6.00/child/day for 2 days a week; Egg/Chikki/Banana to Classes 1–8 in remaining 23 districts at ₹6.00/child/day for 2 days a week	State fund, Flexi fund, State Government Top Up fund
Kerala	₹4/child/day; ₹1,940 crore/annum	State fund
Mizoram	Primary ₹0.66/child/day; Upper Primary ₹0.18/child/day	State fund
Odisha	Primary ₹0.45/child/day; Upper Primary ₹0.65/child/day	State fund
Puducherry	Primary ₹4.95/child/day; Upper Primary ₹3.19/child/day	Central + UT funds
Rajasthan	₹5.15/child/day for milk	State fund
Tamil Nadu	Primary ₹3.32/child/day; Upper Primary ₹0.98/child/day	State fund
Telangana	Fortified ragi java with jaggery 3 days a week; Egg ₹5/child/day for 3 days a week	Cost sharing between State and a trust

Table 6.4 (contd.): Additional per capita contributions: Latest available data (2023)

State	Additional Funds	Source of Additional Funds
Uttar Pradesh	₹4 per week for seasonal fruit	State budget
Uttarakhand	₹5/child	State fund

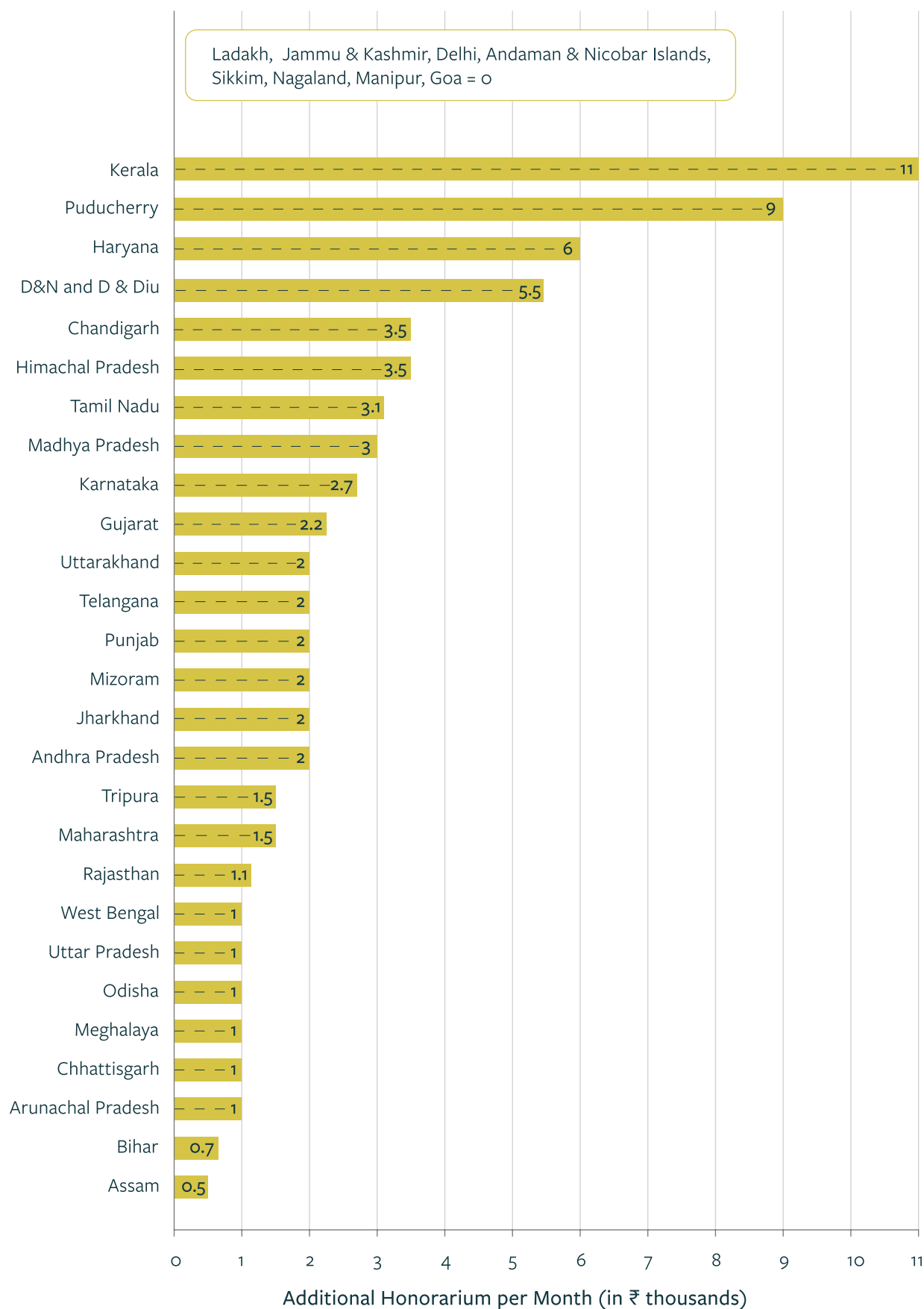
Sources and notes: Annexure 7, Mathur, Meeta, Tanmoy Ghatak, Reema Sood, and Shariqua Yunus Khan. 2024. Landscape Analysis of Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM Poshan) Scheme. World Food Programme. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/november-2024-landscape-analysis-pradhan-mantri-poshan-shakti-nirman-pm-poshan-scheme>.

6.3.3 Honorarium to cooks-cum-helpers (CCH): Norms, expansion and priority to SC/ST

Another component where states make additional contributions is the honorarium provided to CCHs. The norms state that CCHs are entitled to ₹1,000 per month for ten months in a year, which amounts to ₹10,000 per CCH annually. Figure 6.5 shows the per month additional contributions made to honoraria by each state. Kerala provides the highest additional honorarium with a contribution of ₹11,000 from its own funds. Puducherry (₹9000), Tamil Nadu (₹3100–11,500), Haryana (₹6000), Himachal Pradesh (₹3500) and Madhya Pradesh (₹3000) also contribute substantial additional honoraria. Lakshadweep is an exceptional case where the UT has hired permanent staff and pays them accordingly (detailed table in Annexure 4).

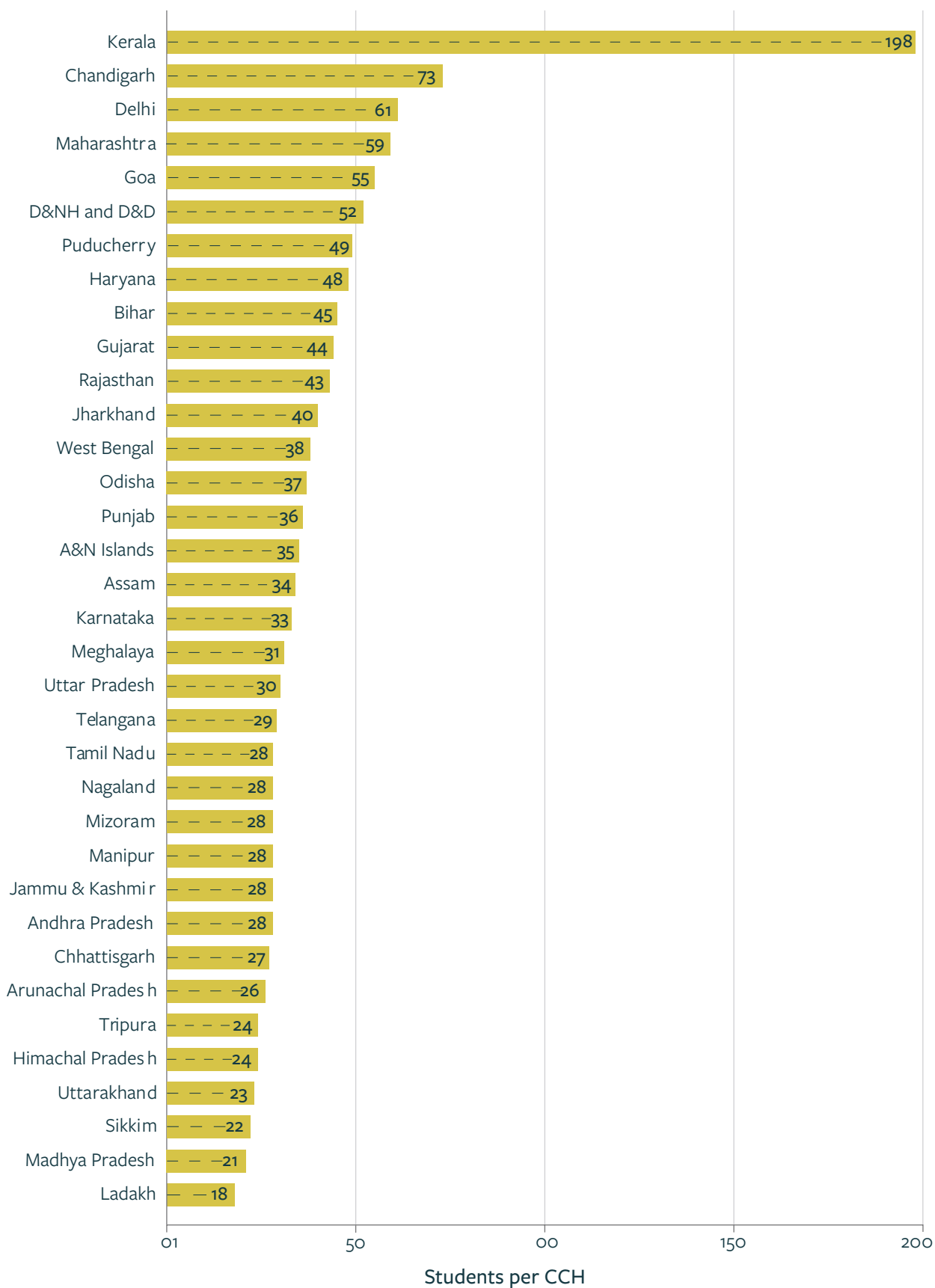
For the majority of states, there are two CCHs per school. Exceptional cases are Chandigarh and Delhi which have eight and seven CCHs per school respectively; these states mostly have centralised kitchens. Among the major states, Kerala, Delhi and Maharashtra have the highest number of students per CCH, whereas Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh have the lowest number of students per CCH (Figure 6.6).

In terms of the social composition of CCHs, priority is to be given to members of SC and ST to be hired as CCH within the MDMS. Figure 6.7 compares the proportion of CCHs from these groups with their share in the population of the state. It is found that most states do accord priority to SC/ST/OBC categories in hiring CCHs as their share is higher than that in the population. Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Meghalaya are among the states with the highest proportion of SC CCHs and Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh are among those with the lowest. With respect to ST CCH percentages, Nagaland (100 per cent), Mizoram (100 per cent), Meghalaya (95.7 per cent), Andhra Pradesh and Manipur have the highest, whereas Uttarakhand, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala have the lower percentages of ST CCHs.

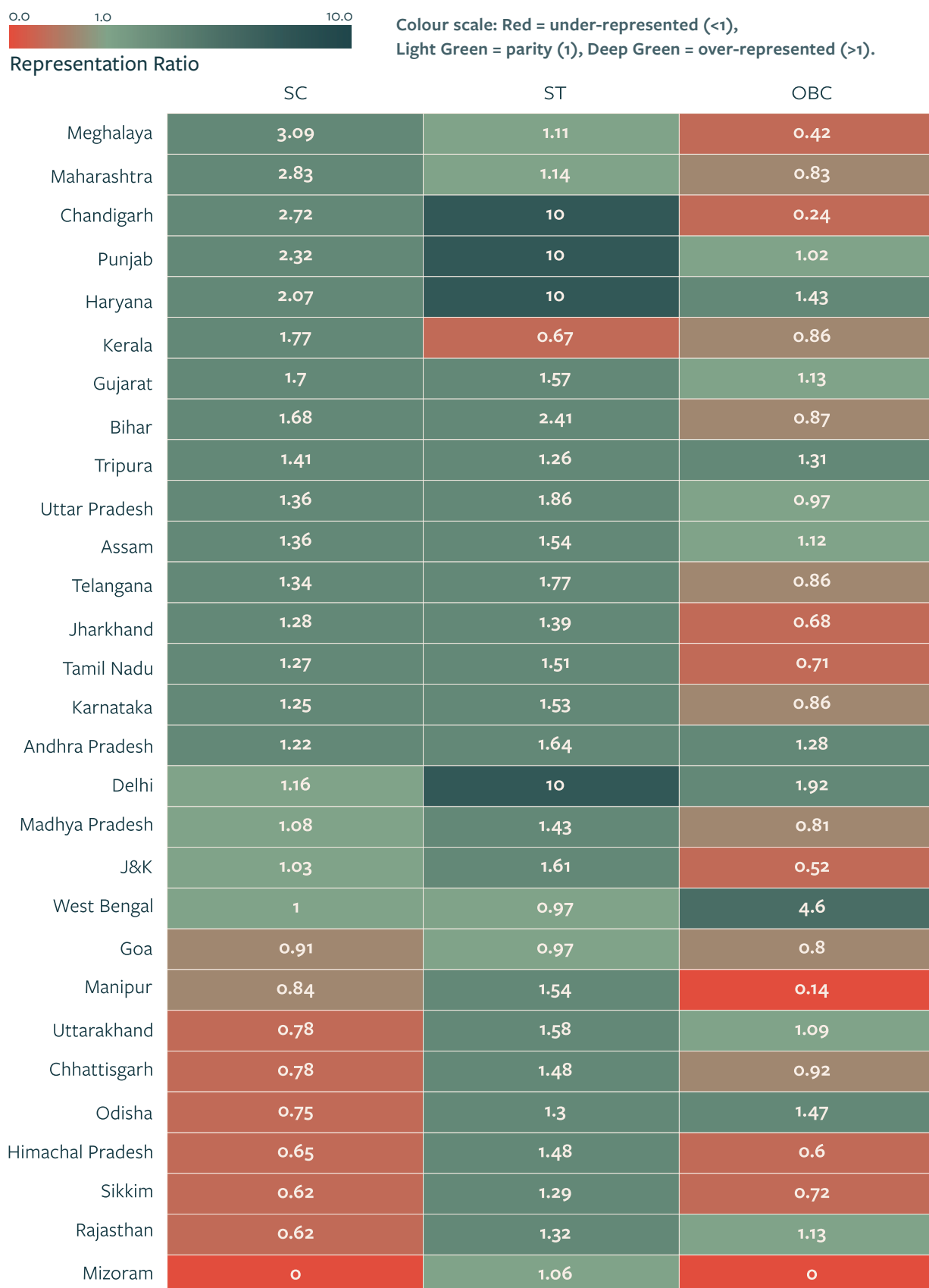
Figure 6.5 : Additional honorarium

Sources and notes: Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3671, asked by Dr. V. Sivadasan, answered on 02 April 2025 by Ministry of Women and Child Development. Lakshadweep doesn't engage CCHs under PM POSHAN. They have their own permanent cooks

Figure 6.6 : Student to CCH ratio by state (2025)



Source: PM Poshan PAB Minutes 2025-26. Lakshadweep doesn't engage CCHs under PM POSHAN. They have their own permanent cooks.

Figure 6.7 : State-wise CCH versus population (Representation Ratio)⁴

Source and notes: Mid-Day Meal AWP&B Tables 2021-22 and Census 2011. CCH percentage calculations include 'Minority' whereas Census percentages do not. Andhra Pradesh represents United Andhra. Telangana caste percentages are from 2025 State Caste Census.

⁴ Representation Ratio = CCH Percentage ÷ Population Percentage

6.4 Grievance redress, monitoring, evaluation and social audits

The guidelines include various provisions for grievance redress, social audits, monitoring and evaluation. Each state is mandated to have a dedicated grievance redressal mechanism just for MDMS issues. There are four tiers of grievance redressal — ‘Steering-Cum-Monitoring Committees (SMC)’ at the local (village and block), district, state and national level. The members of these committees include elected representatives, relevant officials and representatives of parents in the local committees and NGOs in the district-level committees. The local committees are supposed to monitor the regularity and wholesomeness of the MDM served, cleanliness and hygiene and address equity-related issues. Schools are also required to display all information related to the meals prominently, including weekly menus. Annexure 10 provides details of the availability of various grievance redressal mechanisms in states.

Under Section 28 of the NFSA, 2013, social audits are mandatory. The MoE guidelines state that social audit needs to be conducted in either 2 per cent of the schools or twenty schools in each district, whichever is higher. For the latest available year, 2023–24, only Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry had not conducted any social audits.

6.5 Beyond the guidelines

While the above sections examine the status of implementation of the MDMS with regard to the NFSA and the central guidelines, the following section discusses some of the expansions and innovations undertaken by state governments.

6.5.1 Expansion to higher classes

States go beyond the MDMS norms not just in terms of per capita costs but also in their coverage beyond class VIII (Table 6.5). Of the major states, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana provide MDMS to children up to Class 10. The union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry provide MDMS to Classes 11 and 12 as well. This expanded coverage is an effort to ensure retention of students beyond Class 8 which is one of the junctures at which there is a high level of school dropout. In a recent response to a Parliamentary Question, the MoE stated that the highest rate of school dropout (14.1 per cent) is at the ‘Secondary Education’ level (Classes 9 and 10).

6.5.2 Breakfast

Another factor that could help boost school enrolment, attendance and overall nutrition is the introduction of a breakfast scheme. States such as Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have their own Chief Minister’s Breakfast Scheme. While

Table 6.5 : Coverage beyond Class 8: AWP&B write-up, 2021–22

State	Class IX-X	Class XI-XII
Andhra Pradesh	✓	X
Karnataka	✓	X
Tamil Nadu	✓	X
Telangana	✓	X
Lakshadweep	✓	✓
Puducherry	✓	✓

Sources and notes: Mid-day meal AWP&B state write-ups, 2021–22, MDM-PAB Meetings, PM POSHAN Website (<https://pmposhan.education.gov.in/>)

Telangana did have a breakfast scheme under the previous government run by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, the new government, led by the Congress in 2023, discontinued the scheme while introducing its own breakfast scheme for anganwadis under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (Table 6.6).

In addition to this, in October 2025, seven states and union territories — Rajasthan, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Sikkim, Lakshadweep and Gujarat asked the Union government to provide breakfast under PM POSHAN, while twelve other states asked for the MDMS to be extended till Class 12. This is a push from the states to expand coverage under PM POSHAN through Union government spending. While the New Education Policy of 2020, the Ministry of Education and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports have all recommended the provision of a breakfast scheme, the Ministry of Finance has been reluctant to accommodate this so far (Harigovind 2025). It remains to be seen whether this push for expansion in breakfast provision will receive the necessary budgetary support and approval in the upcoming years.

6.5.3 Eggs and menus

In Annexure 8, we examine the detailed menus of each state for the latest available year, 2021–22 from the mid-day meal state write-ups. Figure 6.8 (prepared by Swati Narayan) lists the states that do and do not provide eggs as part of MDMS and ICDS.

- Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh did not provide eggs at all in 2021–22 (latest available MDMS menu data on the PM POSHAN website). Assam and Karnataka have since reintroduced eggs as part of the MDMS.

Table 6.6 : Breakfast schemes

State	MDMS/Scheme name	Menu
Assam	MDMS, announced June 2025	Yet to be seen
Gujarat	Separate; Mukhyamantri Paushtik Alpahar Yojana	Options: Sukhdi, chana chaat, mixed lentils, and ‘Shri Anna’- a mix of millets
Karnataka	Separate; Annapoorna Morning Nutrition Programme	Ragi malt with milk and jaggery
Tamil Nadu	Separate; Chief Minister’s Breakfast Scheme	Options: Upma, khichdi, pongal, sweet pongal/rava kesari/vermicelli kesari
Telangana	Separate; Chief Minister’s Breakfast Scheme	Yet to be seen

Sources:

Assam: *The Assam Tribune*, “Assam Plans to Expand Mid-Day Meal Scheme with Breakfast to Address School Dropouts”;

Gujarat: *Express News Service*, “41 Lakh Govt School Students in Gujarat to Get Breakfast under New Scheme”;

Karnataka: *TNN*, “K’taka Expands Nutrition Prog to All Govt Schools.”

Tamil Nadu: *Social Welfare & Women Empowerment Department, Government of Tamilnadu, India*, “Chief Minister’s Breakfast Scheme”;

Telangana: *T.N.M Staff*, “Telangana Govt Launches Tamil Nadu-Inspired Free Breakfast Scheme in Govt Schools.”

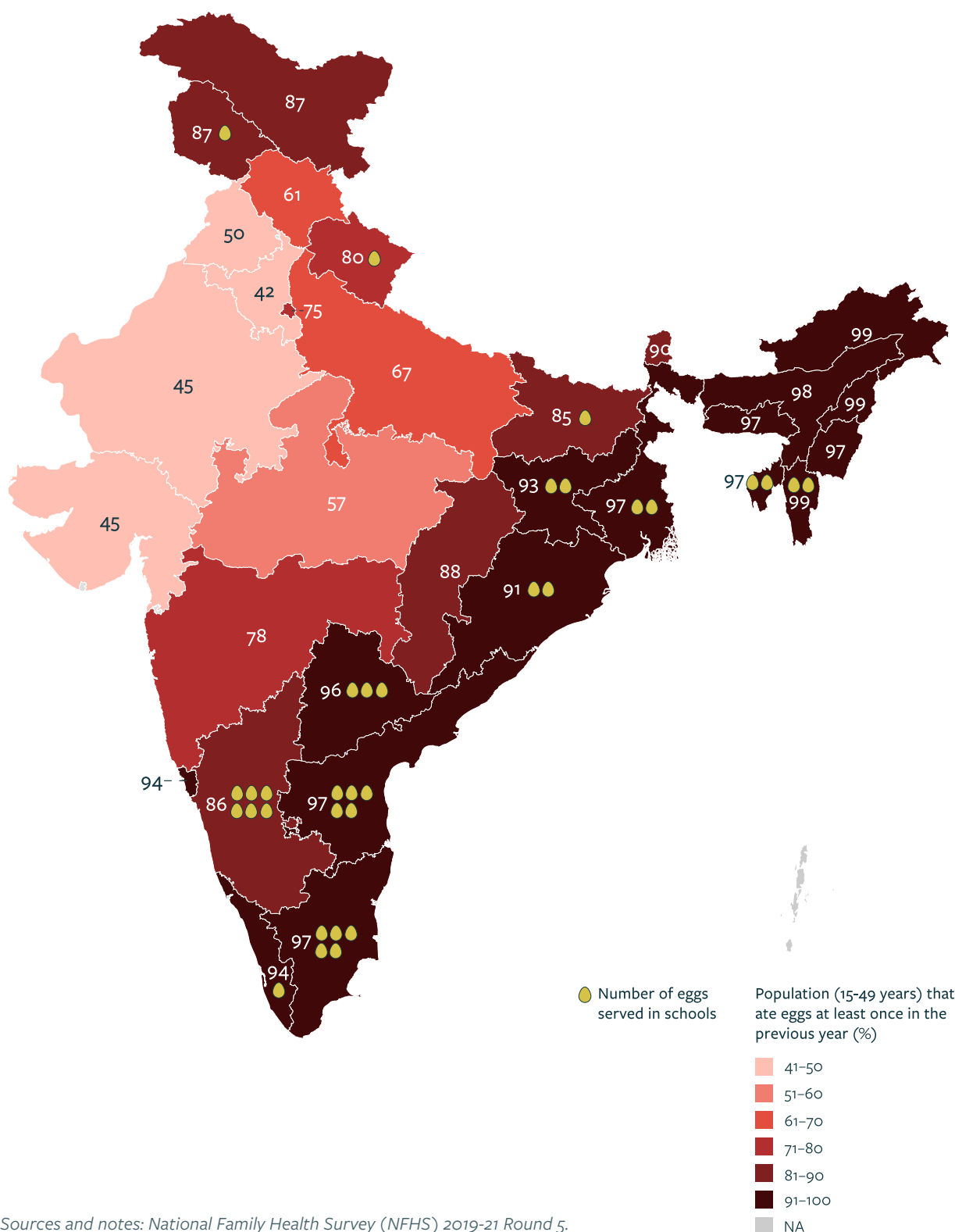
- Arunachal Pradesh did not provide eggs because they were costly (Arunachal Pradesh mid-day meal state write-up, 2021–22); Jammu and Kashmir provided them only in low-enrolment schools and Sikkim provided eggs only once a month. If we consider a high threshold of states with 75 per cent of the adult population consume eggs as part of their diets, ideally states such as Goa, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland should provide eggs as part of their MDMS but they do not.

6.5.4 Fortified food grains

The Union government introduced fortified food in MDMS in June 2017 to combat anaemia. In April 2022, the Union government universalised fortified rice in all government schools under the MDMS. Certain evaluations highlight the positive impact of the implementation of fortified rice in mid-day meals, with better awareness of anaemia and undernutrition and better illness outcomes (Mohapatra et al. 2023; WFP India 2021). Others have argued that fortified rice could cause iron toxicity, threaten biodiversity of food grains and be cost-ineffective (Ansari 2024; Rajalakshmi 2021; Tewari 2018). There are also concerns about fortification as a strategy to address micronutrient malnutrition in place of efforts towards increas-

ing dietary diversity which many recommend should be the primary objective. In this context, they warn that the commercial interests in favour of fortification also need to be examined (Karpagam and Shatrugna 2018).

Figure 6.8 : Number of eggs in schools each week, and percentage of adults who eat eggs



Sources and notes: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21 Round 5.
Map from Swati Narayan (2025), egg figures updated by authors

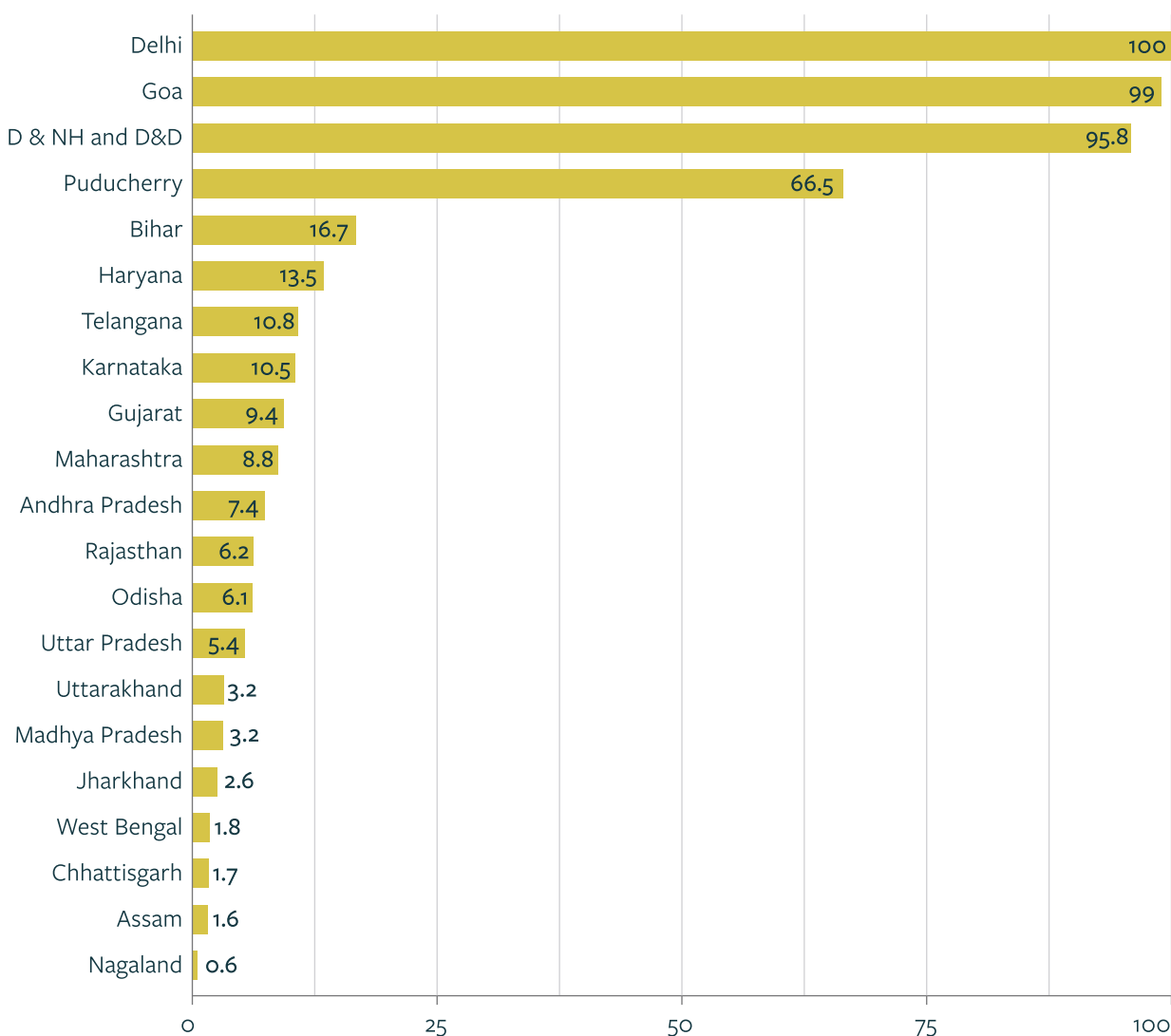
6.5.5 Centralised kitchens

Several states adopt the model of centralised kitchens either partially or fully, where kitchens run by non-profit organisations provide standardised meals to either every school or a cluster of schools in the state. Centralised kitchens are adopted to achieve scale and standardisation.

Delhi and Goa have a universal centralised kitchen model whereas in most major states centralised kitchens account for less than 17 per cent of the schools with some states having none. (Figure 6.9). Alongside Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, all of the northeastern states except Manipur have one kitchen per school or higher. Among the major states, Kerala has the lowest ratio (0.5 kitchens per school) (Figure 6.9 and Annexure 9).

Centralised kitchens have two major issues (Joshi and Karpagam 2022). First, delays in transportation of food from the kitchen to the school, result in cold meals being delivered to the children. Second, MDMS requires oversight and monitoring by teachers and parents, but this is lost in centralised kitchens as they cannot

Figure 6.9 : Percentage of schools served by centralised kitchens, by state



Sources and notes: Source: Mid-Day Meal PAB Minutes 2025-26

monitor something that is far from their school. In addition, there is also a loss of autonomy in daily cooking. Particularly in Karnataka, there has been a tussle where Akshaya Patra (an NGO running centralised kitchens) has refused to serve eggs, onion and garlic due to its religious beliefs. Karnataka schools saw a huge spike in attendance with the reintroduction of eggs in MDM menus (R 2025).

Further, Deeksha (2024) highlights the fact that centralised kitchens hide casteism rather than address it within the MDMS. The Justice K. Chandru committee in 2024 recommended that Tamil Nadu adopt centralised kitchens as, among other things, it could tackle casteism faced by SC/ST CCHs in schools from upper-caste students and parents. However, activists in Tamil Nadu pushed back against this as it would only hide the problem rather than address it (Deeksha 2024). It would also lead to a loss of jobs for local communities and reduce possibilities for their empowerment. Findings from Karnataka in 2019 also show that food wastage is high in schools receiving Akshaya Patra meals as children did not like the taste of the food (Nathan 2019).

6.6 Recommendations/Looking ahead

The MDMS/PM POSHAN is an important scheme that contributes to children's right to food and nutrition as well as the right to education. It has been hailed as one of the best implemented schemes in India given its scale and broad acceptance by communities. The provision of hot cooked meals to all children in elementary classes in government (and aided) schools is a legal mandate under the NFSA and in accordance with directions of the Supreme Court. This review shows that while school meals continue to be provided across the country, the scheme has plateaued and may have deteriorated in some ways over the last decade. Coverage is falling, central allocations have been reducing and there are multiple reports of poor quality. There is a need to refocus on this crucial intervention to expand its reach and improve its quality.

Based on state experiences, a number of things need to be done centrally so that all children in the country can benefit from these interventions. With increasing focus on secondary and higher education, mid-day meals should also be extended beyond Class 8 to Class 12. Such an expansion can contribute to curtailing drop-outs, especially among girl students, in higher classes. Considering that many children come to school hungry, breakfast provision also needs to be included as has been proposed by many state governments.

Including eggs in mid-day meals can significantly improve the nutritional quality of the meal as well as attract students to the school. While several states are providing eggs from their own resources, this needs to be made a national initiative with central contribution. Most children who attend government schools accept

eggs in their diets, while those who do not for any reason can be offered vegetarian alternatives.

The mid-day meal scheme has recently been neglected and is being implemented in a 'business as usual' manner. National priority needs to be restored to the scheme. For this, allocation of better resources by the union government, revised nutritional guidelines and menus, improved monitoring, transparency in data, common review missions and so on need to be initiated.

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