Ph.Studio/Oct.51,A31a. DELHI MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ON (15.10.51). Men and Women voters waiting in queues to cast their vote.
Public Resource via Internet Archive

Realising Rights: An Introduction to the Handbook

CHAPTER 01

Realising Rights: An Introduction to the Handbook

Dipa Sinha and Rajendran Narayanan

India's record on public services and human development is well-known for its contradictions. There has been some real progress: life expectancy has more than doubled since independence, primary school enrolment has approached universality, and infant, child and maternal mortality have fallen substantially. Yet the country consistently underperforms on outcomes that matter. Learning levels remain poor, child malnutrition is far worse than India's per capita income would predict, most workers are in the informal sector with little or no protection, out-of-pocket expenditures on healthcare remain high, and inequalities along religion, caste and gender lines run deep.

The term 'welfare state' is used to refer to a wide range of state arrangements and obligations towards citizens. In this Handbook, we limit our attention to major social policies of the Union government that can be anchored in advancing

socio-economic rights. Institutional architecture and modes of delivery are vital to this, shaping whether the rights envisioned in India's constitutional imagination of welfare are actually realised.

This introductory chapter traces the constitutional foundations of India's welfare commitments, through the rights-based expansion of the 2000s, to the current juncture, where there is a shift away from rights towards an emphasis on transfers. Mainstream discussions on welfare are charged with debates on 'freebies', alongside notions of the fiscal burden of welfare interventions, and treating digitisation as being synonymous with efficiency. At such a time, this Handbook argues for refocusing attention on rights and universal basic services as the foundational pillars of India's welfare regime.

1.1 The welfare overture: From duty to rights

Welfare states are integral to most modern democracies. Emphasising their inseparability from democratic flourishing, the eminent political scientist Harold Wilensky referred to welfare regimes as 'one of the great structural uniformities of modern society' (Wilensky 2006). While the concept of a 'welfare state' emerged in the context of post-World War II western democracies, post-colonial societies such as India incorporated state obligations towards welfare in their founding constitutions.

'It is the intention of this Assembly that in future both the legislature and the executive should not merely pay lip service to these principles enacted in this part, but that they should be made the basis of all executive and legislative action that may be taken hereafter in the matter of the governance of the country.'

- Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Constituent Assembly Debates, 19 November 1948

In India's case, these were laid out in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), which constitute a blueprint for socio-economic justice. The DPSPs are not legally enforceable, but 'it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws.'[1] Many of these have since been codified into law; others are delivered through a web of schemes, entitlements and transfers implemented by Union and state governments. The idea was to make 'central' the principles of promoting welfare and securing the 'rights to work, education and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disability' (among others), central and the 'basis of all executive and legislative action'.[2]

At the dawn of Independence, the twin wounds of the Bengal famine and the horrors of Partition were still fresh. The immediate concerns that had to be

1 Article 37 of the Constitution of India.

2 Constituent Assembly Debates 19 November 1948

addressed were — high levels of illiteracy, extreme poverty and severe food shortages, while simultaneously facing the challenge of boosting economic growth. In 1950-51, the monthly per capita income was just around ₹22, equivalent to around ₹1,040 in 2011–12 prices (Ministry of Finance 2025). The economy was predominantly agrarian, with agriculture contributing around half of national income (Rao 1979) and engaging over 70 per cent of the workforce. Only 11 per cent were employed in manufacturing and trade, while the remainder worked largely in informal services (Sarma 1958). Land distribution was also highly unequal, with more than two out of five rural households being landless in 1954–55 and 47 per cent owning no land or less than one acre, while their share of total land was only 1 per cent (Mahalanobis 1958). Land ownership was skewed in favour of the historically dominant castes.

It was in this atmosphere of inequality and squalor that institutions of governance had to be created with the unenviable task of ensuring that the country's production expanded and that its fruits were efficiently and equitably distributed. It was believed that redistribution of resources was not possible unless adequate resources were generated in the first place.

Progressive laws for labour regulation and social protection were promulgated mainly for those in formal employment in the industrial sector, reflecting the expectation that industrialisation would drive growth. These provisions also had antecedents in the labour movements of the pre-Independence period. However, for the vast majority of rural informal sector workers, 'self-reliance' and a sense of 'duty' towards one's community and nation became central tenets in place of substantive legislation or state provision. A pamphlet issued in 1957 by the Ministry of Community Development, titled 'The Road to Welfare State', urged the rural workforce to engage in local community development work and noted that 'community projects, a plan of the people, by the people, for the people' would 'lay the foundation of the welfare state' (Tillin 2025). From an institutional standpoint, the Block Development Office was set up as a nodal office for welfare delivery in health, education, agriculture and related areas and remains central to the implementation of welfare policies even today.

> *'We cannot have a welfare state in India with all socialism or even communism in the world unless our national income goes up greatly.... In India there is no existing wealth for you to divide; there is only poverty to divide.... We must produce wealth and then divide it equitably.'*
>
> \- Jawaharlal Nehru, 1958[3]

[3] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, Vol. III (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 17, quoted in Niranjan Sahoo, Ambar Kumar Ghosh, and Alok Chaurasia, "'Freebies' and Welfare Schemes: Setting a Framework for the Debate in India," Observer Research Foundation, February 16, 2023.

Divergent welfare trajectories

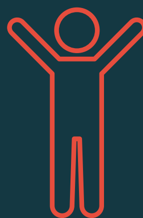
Person A belongs to a rural household with low-income

Person A's mother was a labourer unable to miss work for breastfeed-ing and care. Person A was undernour-ished.

Person A went to the nearest school with limited facilities and had no viable alternatives

Lack of edu-cational at-tainment led to informal, low-produc-tivity employ-ment with poor income. Person A often falls ill, has low sav-ings and relies on informal credit.

Person A had to continue working into their old-age, with no safety net for retire-ment.



Person B also belongs to a low-income household, but their family has access to good quality public healthcare and education

Person B and their mother received ante- and post-na-tal, and early childhood care at the local angan-wadi, and Person B grew up healthy.

Person B's local school was well funded and had adequate teachers and resources.

Access to good quality education allowed Per-son B to be in more secure employment and have higher sav-ings.

During old-age Person B had access to savings, public health and social security.

Icons: Infant by Petai Jantrapoon; childhood vaccination by Tini Sumiarsih; person by asianson.design; person by Gan Khoon Lay, from Noun Project (CC BY 3.0)

The 1960s saw the Green Revolution, which was successful in achieving food sufficiency but resulted in higher rural inequality. Official statistics showed that in 1973–74, a quarter century after Independence, 55 per cent of India's population was below the poverty line (Reserve Bank of India, Database on Indian Economy, Table HBS 14D). Two key interventions were instituted during this period: (a) the Food Corporation of India was established, and continues to be the engine of the Public Distribution System (PDS); and (b) a mandate requiring banks[4] to direct 40 per cent of their credit to 'priority sectors' in rural areas was formulated. This created a pathway for various financial inclusion programmes and other banking services that became pivotal to welfare delivery in later years.

With industrialisation failing to generate the employment that had been anticipated, poverty alleviation, child nutrition and employment programmes were introduced as more direct interventions from the 1970s onwards. For the first time, the radical language of economic rights envisioned in the DPSP entered the popular imagination as calls for an 'employment guarantee' began to take shape. The 1980s saw some expansion in public expenditure, mainly in agriculture, rural infrastructure and public works, which had a measurable effect on poverty reduction.

Structural adjustment policies were introduced in India in the 1990s. These came alongside a shift in the ideological climate towards privatisation, reduced direct provisioning and means-tested targeting of schemes. Budgetary allocations for various sub-sectors of the social sector showed a declining trend during this period (Panchamukhi 2000). Operationally, though, there was one landmark institutional initiative: the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 created the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution and outlined a three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj institutions at the village, block and district levels. Through this, several important functions, such as land development, drinking water, poverty alleviation and women and child development, were devolved to the panchayats. Elections of representatives with mandatory reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women were important milestones in decentralised governance, a key aspect of the welfare state.

In the 2000s, the character of the welfare regime began to change. From 2004 onwards, major social policies reflected a significant shift towards the language of rights (Chopra 2014). A series of rights-based laws, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005, the Forest Rights Act in 2006, the Right to Education Act in 2009 and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, were passed. Beyond legislation, major programmatic initiatives were undertaken. Such as the National Rural Health Mission in 2005,[5] the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Edcuation, in addition to the expansion of the Integrated Child Devel-

4 Banks began to be nationalised in 1969.

5 Later merged into the National Health Mission in 2013

opment Scheme (ICDS) alongside substantial reforms to the PDS in several states with a renewed focus on nutrition as a whole. Mechanisms of accountability came in to mainstream use "via" the Right to Information Act (2005), social audits, independent commissions and grievance redress systems. (Adhikari and Heller 2024). These programmes were usually associated with building local institutional capacity through schools, anganwadis, health centres, ration shops, work sites and so on. Community monitoring was formalised through local school education committees, anganwadi mothers' committees, vigilance committees for ration shops, and village health, sanitation and nutrition committees.

Most of these interventions aimed to achieve clear welfare objectives, such as sending children to school, improving child nutrition, enhancing access to healthcare and guaranteeing employment at minimum wages, while protecting basic rights to education, health, nutrition, work and social protection. Decentralisation was built into programme design. In summary, attempts were made to create institutions or strengthen existing ones, to ensure that the socio-economic rights of individuals were honoured. Drawing upon the DPSP, these interventions began to show results.

1.2 From entitlements to transfers: When rights holders turned beneficiaries

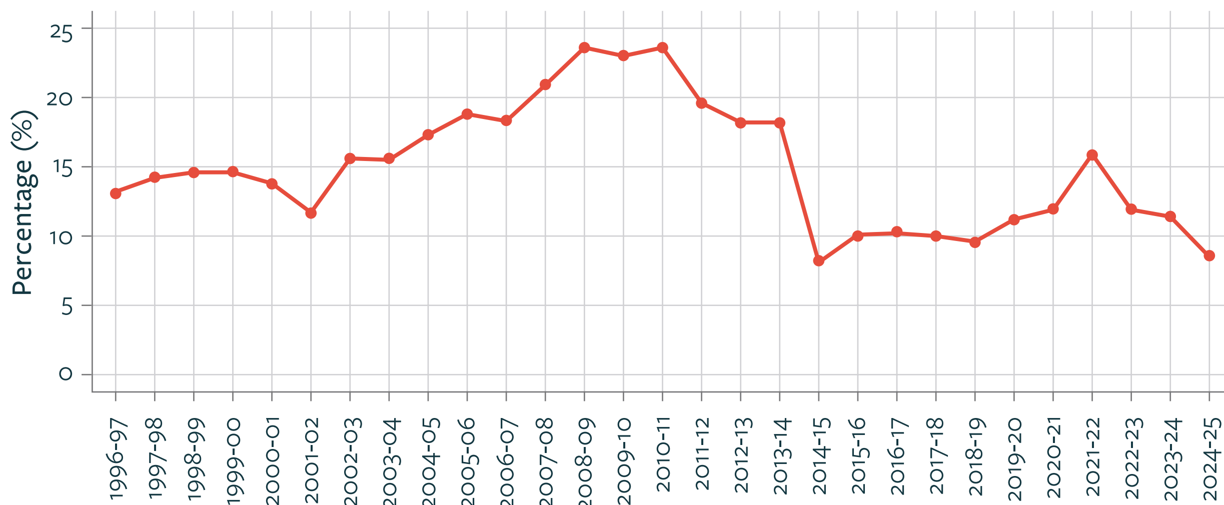
Over the last decade (since 2015), the welfare space has undergone a reconfiguration. Shifting away from the rights-based approach to Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) and centralised flagship schemes. The older initiatives continue, albeit under changed names and with modified approaches. For instance, under the NFSA 2013, two-thirds of the population are legally entitled to foodgrains at highly subsidised rates. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been altered through the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), under which foodgrains are distributed free of cost. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan of the 2000s is now the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the ICDS is now Saksham Anganwadi, and the school mid-day meal programme is now PM POSHAN. Along with the change in nomenclature, the Centre-state relationship in welfare is also changing, as responsibility for delivery has increasingly moved to states through the restructuring of centrally sponsored schemes, changes in the revenue-sharing framework following the GST transition, and reduced central contributions to scheme funding (see Figure 1.1). Some programmes have undergone significant changes to the cost-sharing norms, from either being fully centrally sponsored or based on 75:25 Centre–state contributions, to a revised system of 60:40 contributions. The most recent example of such altering rights-based welfare is the repeal of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) under which the Centre was responsible for 100 per cent of the labour costs and its replacement with the Viksit Bharat Guarantee

for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission, Grameen Act (VB-GRAM-G Act), wherein states have to contribute to 40 per cent of the wages.. States are thus expected to spend more of their own resources on programmes. The Union government's share of total social sector expenditure has declined from a high of about 25 per cent in 2009 to around 10–14 per cent in the last decade. Furthermore, the share of social sector expenditure in total Union government expenditure has declined from around 22 per cent in the early 2010s to less than 20 per cent from 2022 onwards, indicating a declining priority to the social sectors in the union budget. (Figure 1.2).

Since 2015, there has been a simultaneous change in the design and mode of welfare provisioning. One observes the emergence of 'New Welfarism', in which there is a preference for subsidised public provisioning of tangible goods and services over the provision of intangible public goods such as quality healthcare and education. It is argued that New Welfarism may be favoured over traditional redistribution because it is seen to offer greater electoral opportunities (Anand, Dimble and Subramanian 2020). As a result, in some domains there has been a visible expansion of several flagship schemes: housing under PM Awas Yojana, toilets under Swachh Bharat, LPG connections under Ujjwala Yojana and cash transfers to farmers through PM KISAN. It has been argued that this shift substantially changes the nature of the citizen–state relationship, making people dependent on the whims of the state (Khera 2025). Furthermore, these transfers are seen as compensatory in nature, making up for the failure to create employment and ensure decent wages (Hasan 2025; Bhattacharya 2026).

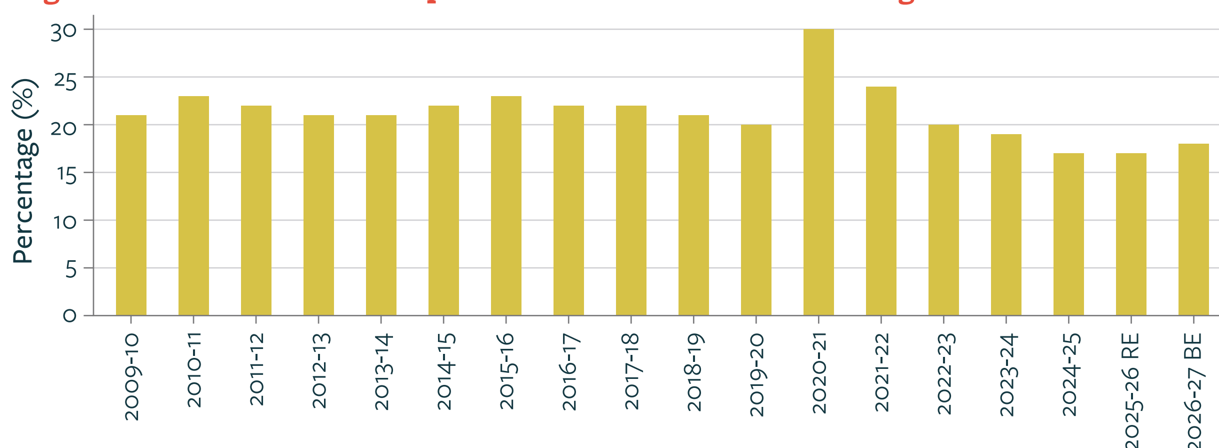
The emergence of digital governance and the expansion of the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile) have, in part, facilitated this transition to New Welfarism by creating the ecosystem for DBT and introducing a technological layer between citizens and the state. In doing so, they have become both a platform and a

Figure 1.1: Union government share in total social sector expenditure



Sources and notes: RBI Database.
State: 2023-24 Revised Estimates; 2024-25 Budget Estimates. Centre: 2024-25 Revised Estimates

Figure 1.2: Social sector expenditure as a % of Union budget



Sources and notes: RBI Database. RE=Revised Estimates and BE=Budget Estimates

governance philosophy. The linking of entitlements to digital identities was undertaken in the hope of delivering welfare more effectively by limiting leakages. The Union government currently implements 324 DBT schemes across fifty-six ministries. Such schemes, particularly unconditional cash transfers in the name of women, have now made an entry into state programmes. About seventeen states currently have such a transfer programme, with many political parties promising some form of cash transfer during election campaigns.

There are important positives associated with digital governance. In line with Section 4 of the Right to Information Act, which mandates proactive disclosure of information, most welfare programmes are now accompanied by a public-facing, web-based management information system. This has made public scrutiny possible. For the state, transfers of funds accompanied by a digital trail have become quicker, administrative overheads have been reduced and dashboards provide a quick reference to key metrics of programme functioning. Increased penetration of bank accounts has improved last-mile access. Faster registration of grievances and quicker resolution are promising aspects of digital governance. However, these positives need to be balanced with some notes of caution, as many chapters in this Handbook highlight. Veeraraghavan (2021) observes three key features of digital governance: 'top-down, iterative and detail-oriented.' This has meant that field-level bureaucrats are often neither privy to technological changes nor adequately trained to adapt to centralised digital architecture and its updates. The lack of clear protocols further exacerbates this problem, and the onus of compliance across digital platforms often falls on the rural poor, resulting in new forms of exclusion (Buddha and Tamang 2023; Drèze 2025). Moreover, digital infrastructures evolve much faster than uneven rural infrastructures can keep pace with, resulting in violations of rights (Nair 2026).

The rapidly evolving modes of delivery and changing welfare regime are altering some of the core objectives of rights-based legislation. These Acts came with legal entitlements, accountability mechanisms and grievance redress systems

that gave citizens formal recourse when entitlements were not delivered. The new cash transfers largely do not. New Welfarism and DBTs provide easily measurable outputs and outcomes. Important as they are, building local institutional capacity, improving accountability and enabling individuals to make claims have been rendered secondary. Some scholars argue that this shift in the governance mindset, from inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes, has hindered the everyday practice of citizenship, making the state distant, opaque and less accountable (Falcao 2024; Chaudhuri 2020; Dhorajiwala 2020). A rights-based welfare regime implies that emphasis must be placed not only on what the state achieves (outputs and outcomes) but also on how it achieves it (inputs and processes).

1.3 This Handbook

This Handbook attempts to map the major interventions of the Union government that together constitute India's welfare regime, examined from a rights-based perspective. Examining policy intent with actual outcomes, it assesses both the successes and the reasons for significant gaps, and reflects on what the current trajectory suggests about the future. With an explicit focus on rural welfare, it covers laws, policies and schemes related to food, health, education, work and social protection, tracing the history of each, assessing its current status and interrogating how well these interventions are actually working.

Each chapter is written by an academic or civil society practitioner with sustained engagement with the scheme or domain in question. The chapters document the objectives and rationale of each intervention, the status of implementation and the key challenges as the authors see them. The aim is not a comprehensive audit but a reckoning with where each domain stands and what the main unresolved problems are.

The Handbook brings together seventeen chapters across major welfare domains and a set of cross-cutting themes. The opening chapter (Chapter 2) on the macroeconomics of welfare highlights the importance of social sector spending not just for human development outcomes but for the economy as a whole. By making the case for welfare spending while also discussing possible sources of finance, it lays out the economic arguments in favour of expanding public services. The next chapter (Chapter 3) on social justice delineates the underlying social inequalities in India and reviews the existing protective, promotional and participative measures undertaken to advance social justice. It finds that in recent times there has been a shift towards individual benefits and away from the inclusion of marginalised groups.

The next set of chapters (Chapters 4 to 6) covers important schemes that address maternal and child nutrition, along with women's reproductive rights. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), the ICDS and school meals are

all part of the NFSA, providing specified nutritional entitlements. These chapters highlight the relevance of these programmes to the lives of millions of women and children and how the benefits they provide, in the form of cash transfers and meals, contribute to a range of objectives, from recognising women's unpaid care work to enabling early childhood development and meaningful participation in school education. At the same time, reduced and inadequate financial contributions by governments are recorded across all three schemes. Concerns surrounding quality and exclusion are highlighted: maternity benefit amounts are too low, mid-day meals are bereft of nutritive items like eggs and the ICDS is not geared towards reaching children under the age of three. Digitisation, especially in PMMVY and ICDS, has created significant barriers, leading to further exclusions. These are documented through case studies from the field.

Chapters 7 and 8 address school education. Chapter 7 follows the trajectory of expansion in school access to near-universalisation of elementary education and examines the centrality of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Despite near-universal enrolment, poor learning outcomes remain a significant challenge. Chapter 8 addresses a specific entitlement under the RTE Act: reservations in private schools for children from economically disadvantaged groups. This provision was introduced to move towards a more inclusive schooling system and has been considered one of the Act's progressive elements. Many gaps remain in implementation, with uneven admissions across states, poor monitoring and impunity among many private schools.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with health. Chapter 9 traces the history of the public health system, while Chapter 10 focuses on government-funded health insurance schemes, which are currently emerging as the main strategy for achieving universal health coverage. These chapters show that the public health system long followed a narrow approach focused on vertical programmes, though this was partially reversed through the National Health Mission, which strengthened the public health system more comprehensively. High out-of-pocket expenditures and distortions introduced by an unregulated private sector remain prevalent. Health insurance schemes at the state level, and PMJAY nationally, have been introduced to address out-of-pocket expenditure, but evidence suggests that they have so far not been successful in doing so. Further, market failures associated with health insurance, such as asymmetric information and moral hazard, appear to be features of public health insurance schemes as well.

Chapter 11 discusses the Public Distribution System, which is the single largest scheme in terms of coverage. This chapter shows how the reach of the PDS expanded significantly after the NFSA, especially in poorer states that did not have their own initiatives. Current challenges, such as outdated population estimates and the lack of diversity in the food distributed, are highlighted.

Chapter 12 on the right to work has been written at a time when MGNREGA was replaced by the VB-GRAM-G Act. Unlike most chapters, which focus in depth on a specific scheme, this chapter traces the history of the right to work in India and locates MGNREGA within that context. The achievements and challenges of MGNREGA, along with concerns surrounding its repeal and replacement, are discussed.

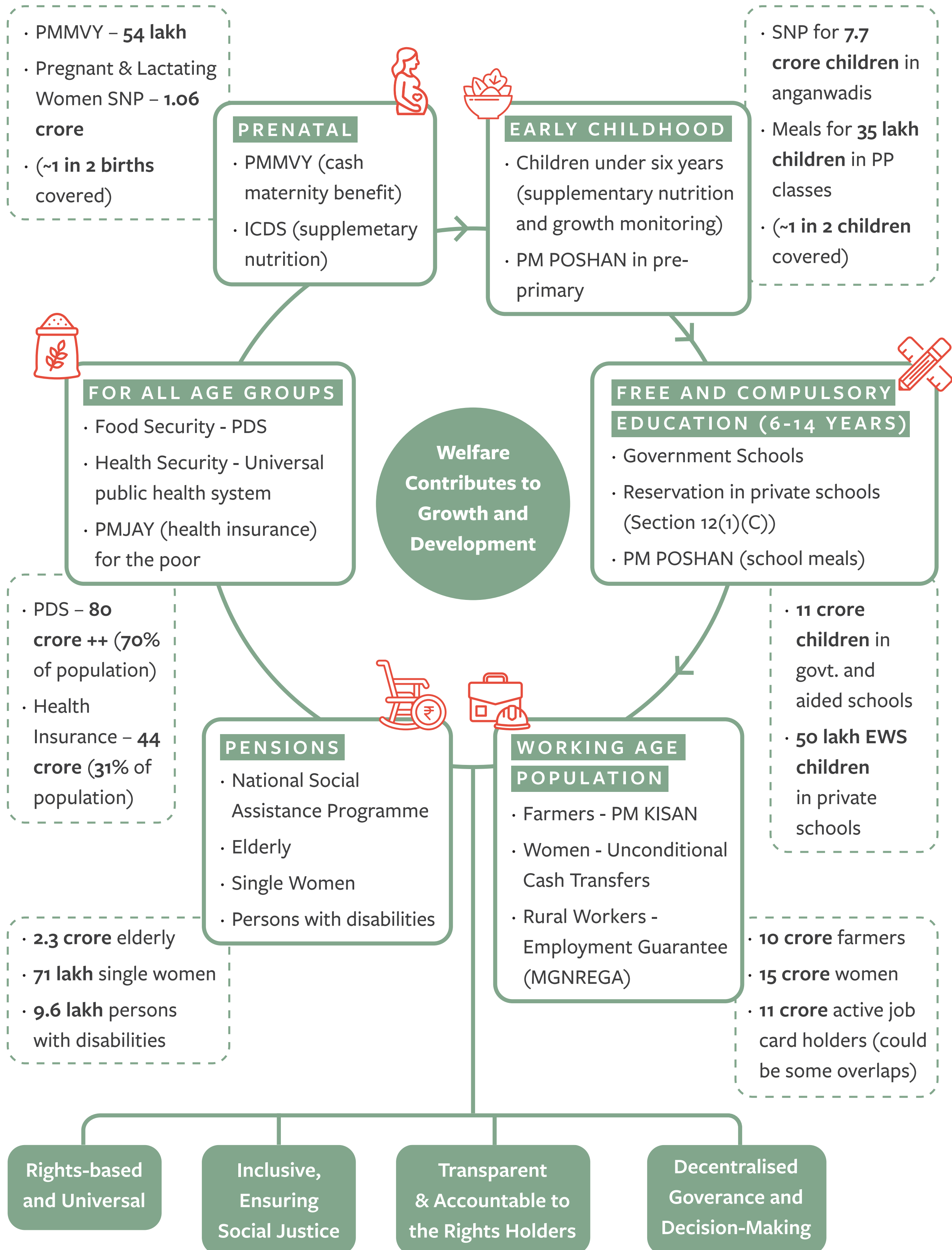
Though each of them addresses a different type, chapters 13 to 15 are all concerned with cash transfers. Chapter 13 discusses social security pensions, which have been part of the rights-based basket of entitlements since their inception. The chapter examines the neglect of these pensions at the Union level, reflected in stagnant coverage and resources, as well as state-wise differences in entitlements. Chapter 14 discusses PM KISAN, an income transfer programme targeted at farmers and one of the largest schemes of the new welfare dispensation. Both chapters, along with those on the PDS and MGNREGA, also discuss the exclusions that digitisation has introduced into these schemes. Chapter 15 is an outlier in this Handbook as it does not discuss a Union government scheme but discusses various unconditional cash transfer schemes introduced by state governments in recent years. The chapter examines the nature and extent of these schemes and the questions they pose for the future of public service provision, given the fiscal pressures they create and the ways in which they could transform citizen–state relationships.

The final three chapters focus on dimensions that affect the implementation of all the schemes and shape the way in which they reach people. Chapter 16 on social accountability discusses how the rights-based legislation of the 2000s also brought in a new system of social accountability through measures such as social audits and decentralised grievance redress mechanisms. Some of these are now being reversed through amendments to the Right to Information Act and the introduction of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. Chapter 17 on decentralisation discusses the importance of transferring funds, functions and functionaries to local governments. It finds that while significant progress has been made, gram panchayats remain largely disempowered, functioning more as cogs in the administrative machinery than as self-governing local bodies. The final chapter (Chapter 18) brings together the concerns regarding digitisation raised across the Handbook,, showing how it has led to exclusion and confusion, and expands this discussion to examine how the 'digital state' is affecting citizenship, rights and welfare more broadly.

These chapters do not exhaustively cover all the welfare schemes of the Union government but have been chosen to represent the most relevant ones for the discussion on strengthening a rights-based welfare regime. Schemes providing tangible goods and services such as housing (PM-AWAS), cooking gas connections (Ujjwala Yojana) or free public transport also represent real improvements

in people's lives. The concern, rather, is ensuring that such provisioning includes the legal entitlements, accountability mechanisms, and institutional capacity that a rights-based welfare regime requires

Figure 1.3: Life-cycle of major welfare schemes



Icons: Baby by Made by Made; education by Kasanah; employment by ari supriharyati; prenatal by Good Wife; Grain by Andi Nur Abdillah, from Noun Project (CC BY 3.0)

The schemes covered by these chapters reach more than two-thirds of the population, cut across the life cycle from 'cradle to grave' and are critical to the lives of the most marginalised. Although this Handbook only includes centrally sponsored schemes, state governments contribute substantially to each of them in terms of resources and are primarily responsible for implementation. Several important state government initiatives also exist and the chapters provide many examples.

1.4 Implications and pathways

The welfare space in India is currently in flux: rights-based programmes are jostling for space alongside 'New Welfarism'. The interventions discussed in this Handbook mostly belong to the 'old' welfare regime. Their age does not make them any less relevant. They are grounded in an idea of socio-economic justice that goes beyond income provision, asking instead whether people are actually able to live decent lives, access education, healthcare and nutrition and participate as equal citizens. The Indian welfare state, in its conceptual imagination, is meant to advance capabilities by serving as a springboard for equal opportunities. This is consistent with what Sen (1999) calls the 'beings and doings' that development must make possible, and with Drèze and Sen's argument that growth without a commensurate expansion of basic capabilities represents a fundamental failure of public action (Drèze and Sen 2013).

The agenda of universal provision of services and social security in a rights framework is of great significance in the current economic situation. Although significant strides have been made in terms of economic growth, this has not been accompanied by the creation of decent jobs or by the movement of workers out of the informal sector (Basole 2022). Real wages have remained stagnant (Das and Usami 2023; Drèze and Das 2024). These conditions constrain the capabilities of a large proportion of Indians to participate as free and equal agents.

In alignment with Ambedkar's vision of socio-economic justice, the chapters in this Handbook seek to place fundamental social and economic rights on the same footing as civil and political rights. They call for a stronger rights-based approach to welfare delivery while recognising the gaps in existing legislations. Some common principles emerge. The importance of universal basic services, in keeping with constitutional provisions, runs through almost every chapter. Universality does not mean uniformity. Given the depth of social and economic discrimination in Indian society, universalism must be accompanied by protective and promotional features that actively ensure inclusion: reservations, preference in the location of services and the appointment of service providers, geographically targeted programmes and similar interventions.

A commitment to free public services does not absolve the state of accountability for the quality of those services or for the exclusions that persist within them.

Ensuring that services build community solidarity and are delivered with dignity requires mechanisms for participation, public scrutiny, transparency, accountability and time-bound grievance redress. Social audits, open data and decentralised grievance mechanisms have been tried in various forms and need to be deepened and expanded, not rolled back. Local governments need to be empowered, allowing flexibility as well as decentralised decision-making. Digitisation must be undertaken through consultation and accompanied by legal safeguards. Grounding welfare in a rights-based framework needs reimagining citizens as rights-holders making claims on the state rather than as 'beneficiaries' receiving largesse from a benevolent benefactor.

Establishing these as the criteria by which welfare policy is assessed can help shape the contribution of welfare to democratic processes. It is through welfare that democratic commitments are made real in people's lives and through which a more equitable and productive society becomes possible. In India, that commitment was there from the beginning. It was a promise we made to ourselves in the Constitution. Seventy-nine years on, the work of realising that promise remains a work in progress.

References

Adhikari, Anindita, and Patrick Heller. 2024. "Civil society, the state and institutionalizing welfare rights in India." *World Development* 182:106687. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106687

Anand, Abhishek, Vikas Dimble, and Arvind Subramanian. 2020. "New Welfarism of India's Right." *Indian Express*, 22 December 2020. https://ashoka.edu.in/static/doc_uploads/file_1608617954.pdf

Basole, Amit. 2022. "Structural Transformation and Employment Generation in India: Past Performance and the Way Forward." *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 65: 295–320. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-022-00380-y

Bhattacharya, Dwaipayan. 2026. "Who Really Benefits from Welfare Transfers?" *The India Forum*, 17 April, https://www.theindiaforum.in/economy/who-really-benefits-welfare-transfers

Buddha, Chakradhar, and Laavanya Tamang. 2023. "From Aadhaar Mandate to Mass Job Card Deletions: Unravelling the MGNREGA Story." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 58 (38). https://www.epw.in/journal/2023/38/commentary/aadhaar-mandate-mass-job-card-deletions.html

Chaudhuri, Bidisha. 2020. "Distant, opaque and seamful: seeing the state through the workings of Aadhaar in India." *Information Technology for Development* 27 (1): 37–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2020.1789037

Chopra, Deepta. 2014. "The Indian case: Towards a rights based welfare state?" In *Development and Welfare Policy in South Asia*, edited by Deepta Chopra and Gabriele Koehler. London: Routledge.

Das, Arindam, and Yoshifumi Usami. 2023. "Downturn in wages in rural India." *Review of Agrarian Studies* 13 (2): 4–28. https://ras.org.in/index.php?Article=downturn_in_wages_in_rural_india

Dhorajiwala, Sakina. 2020. “Who Is Responsible When Technology Fails the Marginalised?” *Economic and Political Weekly* (Engage) 55 (21). https://www.epw.in/engage/article/who-responsible-when-technology-fails-marginalised

Drèze, Jean, and Amartya Sen. 2013. *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. New Delhi: Allen Lane.

Drèze, Jean, and Arindam Das. 2024. “The problem of India’s stagnant real wages.” *Ideas for India* 12 August. https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/the-problem-of-india-s-stagnant-real-wages

Drèze, Jean. 2025. “Treating demographic details on Aadhaar cards as the final word is a recipe for trouble.” *The Economic Times*, 23 February. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/treating-demographic-details-on-aadhaar-cards-as-the-final-word-is-a-recipe-for-trouble/articleshow/118510477.cms

Falcao, Vanita Leah. 2024. “Imagined Entitlements and Real Lives: Technology, Welfare, and Citizenship in India.” PhD diss., King’s College, London.

Hasan, Zoya. 2025. “Freebie Charge Is an Assault on Social Welfare and Rights of Citizens.” *The Wire*, 20 February 2025. https://thewire.in/law/justice-br-gavai-freebie-parasites-assault

Khera, Reetika. 2025. *Revri Ya Haq: Samajik Suraksha Par Ek Nazaria*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan.

Mahalanobis, P. C. 1958. “The National Sample Survey. Eighth Round: July 1954–March 1955, Number 10. First Report on Land Holdings, Rural Sector.” *Sankhyā: The Indian Journal of Statistics* 19 (1–2): 29–180. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25048367

Ministry of Finance. 2025. Economic Survey 2025–26: *Statistical Appendix*. New Delhi: Government of India. https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/doc/Statistical-Appendix-in-English.pdf

Nair, Shobhana K. 2026. “Rural jobs scheme workers flag glitches in monitoring app.” *The Hindu*, 4 March 2026. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/workers-flag-glitches-in-job-scheme-app/article70699998.ece

Panchamukhi, P. R. 2000. “Social Impact of Economic Reforms in India: A Critical Appraisal.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35 (10): 836–47. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4408995

Rao, V. K. R. V. 1979. “Changing Structure of Indian Economy: As Seen through National Accounts Data.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 14 (50): 2049–2051, 2053–2058. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4368233

Reserve Bank of India. n.d. *Database on Indian Economy: Socio-Economic Indicators*. Mumbai: Reserve Bank of India. Accessed May 2026. https://data.rbi.org.in/#/dbie/reports/Statistics/Socio-Economic%20Indicators/Socio-Economic%20Indicators

Sahoo, Niranjan, Ambar Kumar Ghosh, and Alok Chaurasia. 2023. “‘Freebies’ and Welfare Schemes: Setting a Framework for the Debate in India.” *Observer Research Foundation*, 16 February 2023. https://www.orfonline.org/research/-freebies-and-welfare-schemes-setting-a-framework-for-the-debate-in-india

Sarma, N. A. 1958. “Economic Development in India: The First and Second Five Year Plans.” *Staff Papers* (International Monetary Fund) 6 (2): 180–238. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3866051

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Tillin, Louise. 2025. *Making India Work: The Development of Welfare in a Multi-Level Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Veeraraghavan, Rajesh. 2021. *Patching Development: Information Politics and Social Change in India*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wilensky, Harold. 2006. "Social policy: Is there a crisis of the welfare state?" In *Handbook of Public Policy*, edited by B. Guy Peters and J. Pierre, 201–18. London: SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608054.n12