



HAND IN HAND INDIA



**Childhood  
Regained**

**30**

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# FOREWORD



**Dr. Kalpana Sankar**

Executive Chairperson  
Hand in Hand India

Hand in Hand India has dedicated its efforts to rehabilitating the most vulnerable children whose right to live, learn, play, and dream of a better tomorrow was snatched away far too early. Looking back at our journey, I am overwhelmed to witness the change: what once began as a quest to rescue child labourers has ripened into a movement to reclaim childhood in its truest sense.

Unless families are equipped, they will not be in a position to send their children to school. Through our work at Hand in Hand India, we live out this philosophy and aim to provide financial freedom to poor women, empowering them to send their children to school and lead independent lives.

Childhood Regained 2025 is a celebration of the millions of children and their communities who have worked hand in hand to rescue them. Every page is a salute to the stories of those who persisted – children who fought for their rights, mothers who stand up for their families, and teachers who selflessly bridged the gap between despair and hope.

This is the best time to address the challenges that impact children and their growth. We are releasing the third edition of Childhood Regained on the International Day of the Girl Child with a sense of urgency and optimism, hopeful for a positive future when communities, governments, and partners come together.

These stories are a window into the lives of every parent who goes the extra mile for their children, every teacher who refuses to give up, and every partner who drives change by investing in children.

As you flip through the pages of this book, we invite you to join us as an equal partner on this journey of regaining childhood that ensures every child not only survives but thrives, not only learns but leads, and not only dreams but lives those dreams.

# INTRODUCTION

## Why This Book, Why Now ?

Every day, millions of children take on responsibilities beyond their years. Some toil in fields and factories. Others care for siblings as parents migrate for work or cope with the loneliness of growing up with a single parent or alone. For this population, education becomes a distant reality and safety a challenge. Yet, when given the opportunity, these children can excel and thrive.

It is the journey of such children that shows us how lost childhood can, indeed, be regained. Since 2004, Hand in Hand India has worked to restore childhood. We began with the Child Labour Elimination and Education Programme (CLEP) to address child vulnerability, and later expanded to a five-pillar model:



Through our five pillars, we have collaborated with key CSR leaders, governments, and communities, reaching over 370,000 children, providing access to quality education and creating better futures.

Childhood Regained 2025 shares these stories through thought-provoking case studies, detailed metrics, and the lived experiences of the children and the families we support. The book outlines persistent gaps and highlights impactful solutions. Reclaiming childhood is a shared responsibility. Join us in spreading these stories and advocating for children at risk.

*Scan to know more about the five-pillar success model*



# Chapter 1

## Reclaiming Childhood

A healthy childhood should be a time for learning and exploration. For many children in India, who live in a stark reality, this phase never starts or is cut short by poverty, labour, migration, and gender-based inequalities.

Despite strong policies and global protocols in place to protect childhood, India has the largest number of child labourers in the world, many of whom are denied access to education, forced into hazardous labour, or married off before they are ready. For girls, the burden is heavier; unpaid care work, early school dropout, and child marriage are common hurdles.

- ☀ *According to Census 2011, the number of working children in India in the 5-14 years age group was 10.1 million (3.9% of the total child population), of which 5.6 million were boys and 4.5 million were girls.*
- ☀ *Notably, among children in the 10-14 years age group reported as neither working nor attending an educational institution, girls (4.6 million) outnumber boys (3.9 million).*

The issue of child labour and exploitation is linked to multiple layers of poverty, gender inequality, lack of education, and migration and cannot be tackled through a single approach. Since its inception, Hand in Hand India has addressed these root causes through a pillared approach to address multidimensional poverty.

This book is not just about stories of change; it is a window into the lives of children who fought their way back to the classrooms, mothers who found the courage to become self-reliant, and communities that refused to give up on their little ones. The book aims to highlight prevailing challenges: children left behind due to migration, those growing up in single-parent homes with limited support, and those struggling to survive abuse and neglect.

Our aim is that every child should have the opportunity to learn, play, and dream, and all stakeholders, including governments, businesses, civil societies and citizens, have a part to play in bringing about this change.



# Chapter 2

## State of Childhood in India, 2025 - Progress and Persistent Gaps

In the first edition of *Childhood Regained*, we highlighted the millions of Indian children still left behind—working in fields, migrating with families, or dropping out before secondary school. Today, more children are starting school than ever before, and access to schools has expanded dramatically, leading to a significant decline in the dropout rates. Despite progress, challenges persist. The pandemic severely disrupted learning and poverty continues to force difficult choices for families. Adolescent girls remain highly vulnerable.

### The Numbers Behind the Reality



#### Education

Post-pandemic, there was a massive uptick in government school enrolment, with the proportion of 6–14-year-old children up from 65.6 percent in 2018 to 72.9 percent in 2022. However, this number dropped back to 66.8 percent in 2024, according to Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024<sup>2</sup>.



#### Migration

Nearly 93 million child migrants (Census 2011)<sup>3</sup> experienced disrupted schooling, poor healthcare, and social exclusion, with half of them being girls who are often married off early or migrating with families.



#### Health & Nutrition

The NFHS-5<sup>4</sup> reveals that 1 out of every 3 children under the age of five years is stunted, and anaemia remains extremely high at 67.1% among children (6–59 months) and at 59.1% among adolescent girls (15–19 years).



#### Protection

Cases of child abuse, abandonment, and early marriage are widespread, and many do not have any protection system.



## **Out of School Children: The Scale of Exclusion**

Even as enrolment rates rise, millions of children discontinue school. According to UDISE+ 2023–24<sup>5</sup>, at least 47.4 million children in the 6–17 years age group remain out of school. Compared to the 99 million out-of-school children in 2011, the current figure might seem like a positive jump in numbers, but it is still staggering.

Millions of children are losing out on education as they grow older, with 17 million children (6–10 years) already out of school, in the 14–15 years age group, 23% (10.96 million) of children drop out, and among 16–17 years age group, the figure rises to nearly 24.5% (11.83 million). India has made strides in getting children into schools, but retaining them remains a significant challenge.

## Retention and Dropout: Fragile Transitions

If enrolment tells us who starts school, retention tells us who stays. Here too, progress has been uneven. Although retention is nearly universal at the foundational stage (98.9%) and high at the preparatory stage (92.4%), it drops drastically in middle school (82.8%), and by secondary level, less than half of the children (47.2%) remain enrolled. (UDISE+ 2024-2025). The highest risk is observed during adolescence phase, as economic pressures, gender bias, and social norms force children, especially girls, out of classrooms.



## School Availability: Expanding Access

For decades, one of the biggest barriers was the sheer lack of schools, but the picture has changed. In 2014–15, only 2% of schools offered the full span from Classes 1 to 12. Today, out of India's 1.47 million schools, more than 1 million are government-run, and over half provide the complete span of education. This expansion matters because it allows children to continue their studies in one institution without disruptions caused by distance or transfers. But physical access alone cannot guarantee outcomes. For many families, the question is not whether schools exist, but whether sending their children, particularly daughters, feels worthwhile and safe.



## **The Learning Crisis: Beyond Enrolment**

If access is no longer the biggest barrier, learning outcomes are. ASER 2022 showed that post-pandemic reading and arithmetic competencies had dropped to 2010–2012 levels, particularly affecting children from rural, poor, and socially disadvantaged families, due to lack of access to digital ecosystems and supportive families. In contrast, ASER 2024 offers cautious optimism: enrolment in rural areas remains above 98%, with early childhood enrolment on the rise, and foundational learning is recovering with programmes like NIPUN Bharat. Yet the gap is far from closure. Post-lockdown, millions of children returned to classrooms without the ability to read a simple text or perform basic math. Global reports from UNICEF and the World Bank describe this setback as a rise in ‘learning poverty’, where millions of children by age ten cannot read and comprehend even a simple text, a crisis that enrolment alone cannot solve.

## **Child Labour: A Persistent Risk**

For children who drop out, the risks are immediate. Nearly 138 million children globally are engaged in child labour (ILO–UNICEF Global Estimates 2024). The highest risks lie among adolescents from impoverished households, who often leave school to earn for their families. This reality perpetrates exclusion from school and fuels the vicious cycle of poverty.

## **Causes of Exclusion: What Families Say**

Data tells part of the story, while the experiences shared by families give a full picture of the crisis. The NSSO 75th Round Survey highlights the following reasons for children to remain out of school: poverty, lack of awareness, and poor school quality. For girls, additional barriers include early marriage, care responsibilities, and safety concerns. According to insights on migration, parents who relocate for work often take children along, interrupting their education, while others engage them in household chores, due to the perceived uncertain returns from education. Addressing these demand-side barriers is as critical as building more schools.

## **A Dual Reality**

India is home to 472 million children, the largest child population in the world. However, the reality of 2025 is dual: while dropout rates are declining with better access, UDIS Plus data reveals that 47.44 million children (6–17 years age group) were out of school in 2023–24. Learning poverty persists, and adolescents remain highly vulnerable.



ச - சூசா  
ர - ஊர்சல்  
ல - லட்டு

ரண்  
யாத்து  
யர்ச

பெரும்புலியார்



# Chapter 3

## Hand in Hand India's Approach

At the core of Hand in Hand India's philosophy is the Child Labour Elimination & Education Programme (CLEP). Initially focused on rescuing children from exploitative work and integrating them into schools, CLEP has expanded into a multi-faceted support ecosystem where no child is left behind. Through CLEP, we respond to both current and systemic issues: saving out-of-school children, filling gaps in education, assisting vulnerable families, and changing attitudes in the community towards education.

# Our Approach

## Residential & Non-Residential Special Training Centres (RSTCs/NRSTCs)

Safe learning environment for rescued and out-of-school children, offering bridge education prior to mainstreaming them into government schools.

**11 RSTCs and 60 NRSTCs are operational in Tamil Nadu & Madhya Pradesh**  
**4,250 children mainstreamed into formal education**



## Special Schools

Specialised educational guidance assists out-of-school children and students who failed classes 8, 9, or 10, enabling them to get back to school.

**8,000 children passed Class 10 Board Exams across 100 transit schools**



## Scholarships

Specific support to single-parent children and economically underprivileged families to avoid dropouts and promote continuity in higher studies.

**586 scholarships awarded**



## Children Learning Centres (CLCs)

Targeted interventions for slow learners, helping weaker children to move forward with confidence together with their peers.

**100,000 children tutored through 5,000+ CLCs**



# in Action

(Achievements as at August 2025)



## Life Skills Development

Training programmes to enhance soft skills and enable leadership through decision-making abilities, self-confidence, and communication skills.

*10,000 children trained*



## Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education

Innovative coding modules, robotics, and AI programmes for girls, bridging gender disparities in science and technology education.

*1,500+ children trained*



## Strengthening Government Schools

Building better school infrastructure through renovation

*67 Govt. schools supported with infrastructure upgrade*



## Social Mobilisation

Outreach efforts through community-driven campaigns

*1,000,000+ families reached across Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Karnataka*

However, child protection cannot be addressed in isolation. At Hand in Hand India, we have scaled up our model to incorporate a holistic approach that includes all the five pillar interventions.

This integrated design recognises that children are part of larger community ecosystems, and addressing their needs requires a comprehensive approach. This is where our VUP programme comes in.

## Village Uplift Programme (VUP): A Gateway Model

Hand in Hand India's Village Uplift Programme (VUP) encompasses all pillars of development, including child education, women empowerment through SHGs, youth livelihoods, healthcare, government entitlements, and environmental protection.

By empowering families, VUP helps prevent children from falling back into the cycles of labour, migration, and exploitation. It is not just a programme but a holistic model of rural transformation that ensures every child's right to childhood is secured.

# Light of Hope

For Amutha's children from Nelveli village in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, evenings once meant darkness. Bereft of electricity, they were forced to end their daily routine before sunset, and their studies and dreams were cut short by circumstance. A solar kit, comprising a 75-watt panel, solar lamps, and a fan, brought a glimmer of hope. These lights turned the darkness into hours of learning and laughter. Not only did Amutha's children get an opportunity with their education, but her home also became a bustling hub of learning.



What if every child could replace the darkness of lost opportunities with the light of learning?



# Chapter 4

## The Five Pillars of Change

At Hand in Hand India, we have learned that childhood cannot be saved in isolation. A child who goes to school but returns home hungry will struggle to learn. A child rescued from labour but whose parents have little income may be pushed back to work. A girl who completes primary education without the required aptitude in digital or life skills may still face limited employment opportunities. To address pertinent issues like this, our model is built on five interconnected pillars that work together to create child-friendly families, schools, and communities.

### **Child Labour Elimination & Education Programme (CLEP): Opening the Doors of Learning**

#### *Suguna's Second Chance at Life*

An erstwhile child labourer in a crowded Papad-making unit grows up to take on the profession of a skilled nurse in a bustling private clinic. This is the power-packed story of Suguna, a teenager from Sirukaveripakkam in Tamil Nadu, who nearly gave up on her dreams after failing her Class 10 board exams in two subjects—Mathematics and Social Science. Under difficult circumstances, she relented and joined her parents as a daily wage worker in a Papad (thin, crisp, Indian flatbread) factory, earning barely ₹200 a day. Suguna's story is a reflection of many others from India, where nearly 1.1 million children are officially recognised as 'Out of School' (academic year 2024-2025) according to the Unified District Information System for Education portal (UDISE). Through the meticulous interventions of Hand in Hand India, including regular home visits, counselling and coaching, Suguna cleared her board exams in 2024 with a good rank. With her confidence in check, Suguna went on to pursue a Diploma in Nursing and is training to become a nurse. As an apprentice she earns an income of ₹12,000 per month, a marked shift for a "so-called ordinary girl". Suguna's journey is a testament to the power of second chances through education.

CLEP has restored more than 370,000 children back to classrooms. Special residential and non-residential training centres, bridge schools, career guidance, and scholarships ensure that children who previously worked in fields or factories can aspire towards higher studies.



How many more Sugunas could reclaim their future if every dropout was offered a bridge back to learning?



## **Access to Affordable Healthcare: Building Strong Foundations for Learning**

### *Rani's Battle Against Anaemia*

Rani Kumari, an 18-year-old from Khawai village in Bihar's Nawada district, has endured struggles far beyond her age. Unschooled and married off at just 16, her husband, who migrated for work, abandoned her soon after, leaving her without support. The incidence of child marriage remains high in Bihar with around 41% of the women in the 20-24 years age group marrying before 18, as per NFHS-5 data. At 17, she was diagnosed with severe tuberculosis, and with no financial resources or family support, she received no treatment. By then, her lungs were 50% damaged, her weight had dropped to barely 19 kg, and she was also suffering from acute anaemia. With immediate follow-up at the Community Health Centre, supported by the Hand in Hand India team, and a referral to the government's DOTS centre under the National TB Elimination Programme, Rani received free treatment and financial assistance of ₹500 per month for six months. Along with medical care, the team supported her with food, counselling, and encouragement during her recovery. Today, Rani weighs 39 kg, does her household work independently and hopes to restart her life.



More than 53% of women in the 15-49 years age group are found to be anaemic and nearly 23% of men of the same age group are affected in India (NFHS-5). Unless addressed, this impacts attendance at school directly, learning, and dreams. Through its health initiatives, Hand in Hand India ensures that no child is left out of school due to illness.

From WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene)-related upgrade in the school premises, to nutrition counselling, awareness on menstrual hygiene, mental health support, and early childhood care - these are pivotal endeavours that lay the building blocks for learning and education.



What if health and education always went hand in hand? How many more children like Rani could reclaim their childhood?



**13,465**

Medical Camps conducted



**1,126,599**

Medical Camp Beneficiaries



**64,402**

Members covered under Treatment for Anaemia



**204,548**

People Sensitised through WASH Programme



**88,074**

Individuals benefitted from Eye Screenings



**44,607**

Pairs of Free Spectacles distributed

## Women's Empowerment & Job Creation: Mothers as Changemakers

*When mothers are empowered, generations are transformed*



### *Tamil Selvi*

Abandoned by her husband, Tamil Selvi was left to raise three children alone. Life was full of shame and struggle. With a small Self-Help Group (SHG) loan, she began making herbal products and gradually established her business. Now, her two sons are police officers, and her daughter is a school teacher.

*"I raised my children on my own strength, and today, society recognises my efforts. With Hand in Hand India's support, I found the path to grow."*

### *Chitra*

When her husband retired, Chitra worried about how she would educate her children. Through her SHG, she accessed loans and learned about government schemes. With courage and resilience, she continued to support the education of her children. Thanks to her perseverance, today, her daughter is a manager in a reputed bank, and her son is engaged in an IT company.



*"The loans and training I received didn't just change my life—they gave my children a brighter future. The SHG gave me courage to dream again."*



## Sri Vidhya

Hailing from a family of handloom weavers, Sri Vidhya struggled to make ends meet. With SHG support, she set up her own saree unit. Today, she employs 18 women, earns up to ₹500,000 a month, and runs the business with her son by her side.

*"What began as my small dream is now our family's business, with my son by my side to carry it forward."*

Together, these stories show how one empowered mother can change the destiny of an entire family. What if every mother had this chance?

When mothers earn, children learn. SHGs give women financial access, skills, and confidence to build businesses and secure their children's futures. A recent Hand in Hand study showed that among 99 SHG mothers, their children grew into entrepreneurs, engineers, teachers, bankers, earning an average of ₹38,259 per month, with some crossing ₹150,000.

A study conducted by Hand in Hand India in February 2025 of 99 SHG mothers reveals how women's empowerment transforms generations:

- ☀️ 29 of their children are entrepreneurs, 14 are engineers, 12 hold managerial positions, and many others are thriving as doctors, teachers, bankers, and police officers.
- ☀️ Their average income is ₹38,259/month, with some earning over ₹150,000. Behind these successes are home-based enterprises, such as tailoring, textiles, food processing and digital services, that enable mothers to earn while caring for their families.
- ☀️ The foundation of the Indian economy, Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) play a major role in employment, exports, and overall economic expansion. Accounting for over 30% of India's GDP, MSMEs play a vital role in building a self-reliant India.



What if every mother had this chance? How many more childhoods would be safeguarded?

## Skill Development & Technology Centres (SDTC): Pathways for Youth

### *Crafting Livelihoods, Preserving Culture*

In Peenjamandhai Hills, a tribal belt in Tamil Nadu, migration was once the only means of survival for youths. Hand in Hand India's Skill Development & Technology Centres (SDTCs) rewrote this tale by providing training that not just generates livelihood but also honours heritage. Young people here are being trained in traditional skills such as tailoring and beekeeping, alongside newer skills like making solar lamps. These give them sustainable incomes without having to leave their villages and also help preserve artisanal skills handed down through generations. With older brothers and sisters work with pride, younger kids are now able to stay in school and dream of futures full of choice, not compulsion.

Teenagers and young adults from poor families frequently risk falling into exploitative labour markets. SDTCs provide them with vocational skills, computer literacy, and entrepreneurship training, breaching the distance between education and decent jobs. Hand in Hand India's Skill Development & Technology Centres (SDTCs) provide these young people with an opportunity to live a life of dignity. At the centres, youth acquire vocational skills like tailoring, embroidery, beauty and wellness, plumbing, electrical work, motorcycle service, retail, food processing and more. In addition, there are specific programmes for uniformed services preparation, IT literacy training, and entrepreneur support with business mentoring.




This not only guarantees their future but also keeps them away from relapsing into poverty, child labour, or child marriage. Such initiatives particularly contribute to areas such as Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, channeling youth from dangerous fireworks units into safer profession such as tailoring, mobile servicing, and retail-breaking a cycle of exploitation.



### *New Age Literacy Tools Rescue Manju*

Manju, from Sivakasi, was forced to work in a fireworks unit due to her father's ailing health, even though her ten-year-old peers were still in school learning to write with their nimble fingers. However, after receiving digital literacy through Hand in Hand India's Basic Computer Training under the Jylag Foundation Project, several alternate options opened up for Manju, and she found a stable job as a data entry operator in a local supermarket, earning about ₹8,000 per month. This is just one of the many stories where Hand in Hand India, through its interventions, helped Manju break the cycle of poverty and exploitation, empowering her to build a better life for herself and her family.

 What if every young person had the skills to protect not only their future, but their siblings' childhood too?

## Environment: Safe, Clean Communities for Children

### Sustainable Waste Management (SWM): Turning Waste into Opportunity

At the heart of our work is a simple belief: waste can be transformed into opportunity. Through our Sustainable Waste Management (SWM) division, we are creating cleaner communities, reducing environmental risks, and empowering families, especially the most marginalised waste pickers. Often overlooked in society, waste pickers form a vital part of the circularity ecosystem but live in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

We begin by identifying and engaging with these individuals, then support them through the structured “3 E” approach: Engage, Educate, and Empower. Through this model, we uplift their livelihoods and those of their families, especially their children, through access to tools, skills, literacy, and government benefits. Children of waste pickers, once at risk of dropping out of school or being pulled into informal labour, are now experiencing improved access to education, nutrition, and stability at home - the building blocks of a better childhood. Our SWM initiatives also reach schools through Eco-Clubs, where children are nurtured as young environment champions.



**316,624**

Beneficiaries sensitised



**5,774**

Members trained



**57,437**

Households covered



**56**

Wards supported



**78**

Panchayats supported (Group of Administrative Villages)



**44**

Municipalities supported



**3**

Corporations supported



**313 MT**

Plastic waste recycled



**2,520 MT**

Non-recyclable plastic waste disposed/handled



**27 MT**

Biodegradable waste handled



**4,626**

Recycle Guardians (informal waste pickers) supported

\* MT - metric tonne

## Deepa's Journey: From Ragpicker to Resilient Mother

This is not the typical rags-to-riches story, but one that highlights how the right intention can bring change. Deepa, a ragpicker from a gypsy community in Melakottaiyur, Tamil Nadu, earning a meager sum of ₹5,000 per month and struggled to provide for her daughter. With the help of the Sustainable Waste Management (SWM) initiative, Hand in Hand India supported her with the tools to improve her life, including safer working conditions, financial literacy, ABHA and E-Shram cards (Govt. IDs), and confidence-boosting workshops. Today, she earns around ₹8,000 per month. Deepa was able to enrol her six-year-old daughter, Sivasakthi, in school, and a solar lamp provided under the project enabled Sivasakthi to continue learning at home in the evenings. Today, Sivasakthi shares the joy of learning with her mother, exemplifying how empowering one mother can spark positive change for the next generation.

💡 What if every waste picker's child had the same chance to learn under the light of opportunity instead of the shadow of poverty?



## Natural Resource Management (NRM)

### *Securing Childhoods Through Sustainability*

NRM is not just about protecting and sustaining the environment—it is about protecting children's futures by preserving the natural ecosystem for a better tomorrow. Through a range of activities like conserving water, restoring ponds, planting trees, and promoting climate-smart farming, families gain food security, clean water, and reliable incomes. When households are stable, children are no longer pulled into labour, forced into early marriage, or trapped by malnutrition. Every tree planted and every pond restored is also an investment in a child's right to grow, learn, and dream.





## *Green Climate Resilient Villages, Manavadi*

Cultivating eco-conscious students should begin at school, and fostering this behaviour, Hand in Hand India has supported four schools across Manavadi Panchayat in Tamil Nadu to set up and maintain vegetable gardens. Besides the zeal of the children to become climate warriors, what made a difference in the upkeep of the gardens is the students' collective called Pasumai Padai (Green Brigade). Made up of 12 students in each school, the group supported in cultivation and harvesting of these vegetables crops. Beyond the school, they have taken this learning home, creating small gardens with their families. For the children, tending to the gardens has become a lesson in responsibility, teamwork, and sustainability, proving that climate resilience starts in the classroom.



How different would our future look if every child grew up planting the food they eat and protecting the land they inherit?

## **Together, the Five Pillars**

Together, these pillars thread a safety net strong enough to reclaim childhood. A healthy child with a learning opportunity, accompanied by an empowered mother, older siblings with decent jobs, and a clean environment, this is how childhood is really reclaimed.

# Chapter 5

## Migration and Childhood Lost

### *When families move, children are often left behind*

Migration is one of the most silent disruptors of childhood in India. For millions of families, moving from village to city or from state to state is not a choice but a survival strategy. Parents migrate in search of work in brick kilns, construction sites, garment factories, or farms. In this process, children either migrate with them or are left behind with relatives. In both cases, their childhood is fractured.

### **The Scale of the Issue**

- ☀ India has nearly 93 million child migrants (Census 2011)<sup>12</sup>, with updated studies showing seasonal migration continuing to rise.
- ☀ In Maharashtra's Jalna district, half of all school-age children migrate with families and stop schooling for months, according to a joint IIPF-UNICEF study.
- ☀ Children of circular migrants face low immunisation rates, malnutrition, and zero access to education during migration periods.
- ☀ Girls are especially vulnerable, facing early marriage, household work, or unsafe conditions in new settlements.
- ☀ Repeated migration increases the risk of chronic undernutrition. A BMJ Nutrition study of circular migrant children in Bihar's brick kilns found that only 42% were fully immunised, compared to the 62% national average.

Beyond education and health, the emotional toll is deep. In flood-affected regions like Assam's Dhemaji, men migrate for cash income, leaving behind children and elderly in fragile homes. Studies by IIT Guwahati highlight how this absence places an emotional and logistical burden on children, especially girls, who take on adult responsibilities. Globally, climate-driven migration is expected to displace over 113 million children by 2050, compounding risks for India's most vulnerable. Migration doesn't just interrupt learning. It uproots friendships, breaks continuity of care, and often exposes children to exploitation.



## Hand in Hand India's Response

At Hand in Hand India, we view migration not just as a family's economic decision but as a childhood rights crisis. Our interventions aim to cushion its impact by:

- ☀ Rescuing and mainstreaming out-of-school migrant children through residential and non-residential special training centres.
- ☀ Running Transit Schools that give children a second chance at formal education.
- ☀ Providing scholarships to children of single parents or migrant labourers to ensure continuity of schooling.
- ☀ Working with mothers through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) so that families don't have to migrate out of desperation.
- ☀ Mobilising communities to create child-friendly villages where migration risks are addressed collectively.

## Stories of Migration and Resilience - Children Left Behind by Migration & Poverty



*“Impressive to see the girls (in Bharathiyar RSTC) excel in all forms of extracurricular activities and studies. Great effort by the Hand in Hand India team. Please keep it up!”*

Ms. Kalaiselvi Mohan, IAS  
District Collector  
Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, India

### Kalpana's Step Into Learning

For children from the vulnerable communities, the first casualty of poverty and migration is often education. This is the story of Kalpana, a 10-year-old from a tribal community in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, who had never attended school. The reason was that her parents often migrated for work, and the nearest school not within walking distance, so she was mostly left alone at home while her parents were at work. She was identified by the CLEP team in 2024 and was admitted to the Bharathiyar Residential Special Training Centre (BRSTC) for continued education. Today, she is in Class 7, in a happy space with her peers, thriving with support to learning, nutritious meals, and emotional support.



How many children like Kalpana remain elusive of education because of distance and poverty?



## From Chores to Classrooms: Ramya's Return to Learning

Household chores, fishing and cooking were what made up a typical day for the 12-year-old Ramya from Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. With both her parents working in the rice mill, she was forced her to live with her grandmother, who often moved for work. As a result, Ramya dropped out of school and spent her days fishing and cooking. The social mobilisation team of CLEP enrolled her in the BRSTC in Visoor. Now in Class 7, Ramya has found stability, receiving academic rigour, meals, and support for her overall growth. Her return to education marks not just a change in her daily life, but a reclaiming of her childhood.

 What futures are lost when girls like Ramya are pushed into chores instead of classrooms?





## Breaking the Chain of Migration

In Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, Mamta, 13, dropped out of school for nearly three years and was staying as an in-house help with her family, who had migrated to work in the brick kilns. Identified by CLEP's social mobilisation team, Mamta's guardians were encouraged to send her to the newly-established bridge school, the Non-Residential Special Training Centre (NRSTC) in Umarpura. However, despite initial resistance by her family, the staff could overcome the hesitation through an interaction with parents of other students, who were admitted to the NRSTC. Mamta was encouraged by her community and finally brought back by her family. Starting from scratch, she quickly caught up and passed her Class 4 exams, re-entering government school as a Class 5 student. Today, Mamta is back on track; her story showing how second-chance at education can undo the setbacks of migration.



What if every migrant child had a bridge like NRSTCs to return to school?

# Chapter 6

## Children at Risk - Abuse, Abandonment

### **Giving the most vulnerable children a ladder to rise**

For many children, childhood is tainted by abuse, abandonment, or unspoken pains. Such children often fall through the cracks, pushed out of school, forced into the workforce, or burdened with responsibilities too big for their age.

### **The Hidden Crisis**

According to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), one out of every three children in India has suffered some kind of abuse. Children from single-parent are particularly susceptible to dropping out of school due to economic pressure. Abandonment drives many others into hazardous labour, early marriage, or unsafe environments.

What these children lose is not just opportunity but also their safety, dignity, and dreams.

### **Hand in Hand India's Support Systems**

At Hand in Hand India, we believe that the right support at the right time can change a child's story. For children at risk, a scholarship is not just money—it is a lifeline. Counselling is not just guidance—it is healing. Here's a glimpse into some of the key facts and figures from our programmes:

 Scholarships for children of single parents or abandoned children to ensure they continue their education.

***(586 vulnerable children supported to continue school)***

- ☀ Community Awareness to remove the stigma against single-parent families and make sure that abandoned children are not left out.  
*(1,000,000+ families sensitised)*

Not all children are privileged to have a safe and nurturing home. For them, childhood is a reality of abuse, abandonment, or the challenges of single-parent families.



## Stories of Courage and Breakthroughs

### Keerthana's Return to School

Keerthana, 12, from a tribal community in Tamil Nadu, had lost her father and was left to fend for her brother and herself, after her mother's second marriage. Forced to stay with her uncle and with no means of pursuing further studies, she had to drop-out of Class 5. Through the guidance and support of the CLEP mobilisation team, today she has found a safe space at the Bharathiyar Residential Special Training Centre (BRSTC). Over time, Keerthana has evolved into a vivacious 13-year-old with a desire to support her brother's education.



### Rajeshwari's New Beginning

Like Keerthana, 12-year-old Rajeshwari from a tribal community in Tamil Nadu faced a similar fate after being abandoned by her mother, who remarried following her husband's death. She was forced to babysit her elder brother's children and eventually dropped out of school to support at home. Hand in Hand India identified her in 2024 and enrolled her in BRSTC, Visoor. Now in Class 7, she enjoys a safe space to learn, play, and grow. Her transformation is proof that with the right support, vulnerable children can reclaim both education and childhood.

## Rani's Road to Education

Rani, 13, from Madhya Pradesh, had to leave school when her mother remarried and left the family. Living with her grandparents, she became responsible for caring for her four younger sisters and household work. Her father, a daily wage labourer, could not support her return to school. The Hand in Hand India team met Rani during a community visit and, through regular counselling with her grandparents, the team emphasised the importance of education and encouraged them to send Rani back to school. She was enrolled in a Non-Residential Special Training Centre (NRSTC) and is learning along with her peers. With a renewed enthusiasm and cheer, Rani's story shows how timely support can bring children back to school and give them the chance to shape their own future.



What if every child, regardless of loss or circumstance, had the chance to return to school?



# Chapter 7

## The Power of Partnerships - CSR & Communities for Children

### **Because raising a child takes a village, and a vision**

Saving childhood requires a collective effort. It requires diversified stakeholders, including communities, corporations, and civil societies all converging and working hand in hand to build ecosystems in which children can thrive. Partnerships and collaboration have been the strength of Hand in Hand India's operations, ensuring that solutions are not only implemented on the ground but also scaled, diversified, sustained, and grounded in local context.

### **The Changing Landscape of CSR for Children**

In recent years, CSR has shifted from short-term philanthropy to long-term, systemic investment. More and more companies are aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with emerging priority areas including child rights and education.

#### **Key trends include:**

- ☀ A shift from rescue-based approach to preventive, community-based models.
- ☀ Greater impetus on girls, children in remote/rural areas, and urban slums.
- ☀ Investments in STEM, digital access, safe spaces.

## Hand in Hand India's CSR Collaborations



*"Hand in Hand India has established digital classrooms and STEM labs through various CSR collaborations with the support of the Govt of Tamil Nadu. Their work is commendable, particularly in the area of digital education for vulnerable children"*

S. Kannappan  
Director of School Education  
Government of Tamil Nadu

## Nissan Renault Financial Services India (NRFSI) Bridging the Digital & Gender Divide

Over 1,343 children from six government schools of Tiruvallur, Tamil Nadu, are discovering science in new ways, with most of them being girls. Introduced to digital labs set up with support from Nissan Renault Financial Services India, students are learning STEM, coding, and even AI. For these girls, hailing from rural backgrounds, who once believed "science wasn't for them," these labs have become windows to possibility. With hands-on learning and equal access, there is a shift in the confidence of these students, who dream of becoming scientists, engineers, and innovators.



## *Saint-Gobain India - Safe Spaces in Urban Slums*

In the heart of Chennai's slums, six Police Clubs (also called as Integrated Children Development Centres) supported by Saint-Gobain India have become safe havens for over 700 children. Here, evenings are filled with tuition classes, spoken English, computer lessons, and self-defence training. Children also participate in sports, scouting, career guidance sessions, and district-level competitions. What was once an unsafe stretch for hours after school is now a time for learning, confidence, and community. These clubs are not just keeping children off the streets, they are helping them believe in brighter futures.





## Aadhar Housing Finance Pvt Ltd - Rescue & Rehabilitation in Madhya Pradesh

More than 500 dropout children in Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh, received a second chance at education with the help of special training centres constructed in collaboration with Aadhar Housing Finance Pvt Ltd. Through the project, parents and communities are motivated to resist child labour and early marriage, so that children not only go back to school but also pursue their studies without any interruptions.

### Aadhar Housing Finance Limited - Dhar District, Madhya Pradesh

Rescue & Rehabilitation of Out-of-School (OoSC) Children

#### Phase I (Aug 2024 - Mar 2025)



**56**

OoSC identified



**20**

supported at home



**65**

enrolled in 2 NRSTCs



**40**

mainstreamed into Govt. schools

#### Phase II (May 2025 - Mar 2026)



**374**

OoSC - Target



**6**

NRSTCs established



**213**

children enrolled



**250+**

mainstreamed into Govt. schools

## Jochnick Foundation - Child-Friendly Communities in Mica Regions

Hand in Hand India and the Jochnick Foundation are transforming 80 communities in the mica-belt of Bihar and Jharkhand into safe havens for children. This partnership is helping rescue children from child labour, fight malnutrition, empower mothers with livelihoods, and build awareness to curb early marriage. In a state like Bihar, which comprises 25% of all out-of-school children in the 6-13 years age group in India, these changes are a major leap in securing childhood and opportunity for its most vulnerable.



### Community as Equal Partners

Partnerships are not only with corporations but with the communities themselves:

- ☀ Mothers in Self-Help Groups who ensure their children stay in school
- ☀ Youth volunteers who mentor younger children
- ☀ Village-level committees that prevent child marriage and child labour
- ☀ Child Rights Protection Committee with over 14,000 volunteers

When communities take ownership, interventions outlast projects, leading to sustainable and lasting change.

## Stories of Change Through Partnerships

### Realising her STEM Dreams

Yoshitha from Tiruvallur in Tamil Nadu, a Class 7 student, had never used a computer before. Thanks to the Nissan Renault Financial Services India Private Limited (NRFSI) partnership, she now has access to a STEM lab where she has learned to code basic apps and hopes to pursue a career in engineering.



### From the Streets to a Safe Space

Hari Prasad, a young man from Chennai's slums, used to wander the streets, leaving him open to gang attacks. Thanks to the Saint-Gobain-supported Police Club, he now attends football practices and tuition classes in the evenings and aims to become a DGP (Director General of Police). This is part of the larger partnership with Saint Gobain, our CSR partner, who helped set-up six Police clubs for slum children in 2023. Initiatives such as scout training, sports, self-defense, spoken English classes, evening tutoring, and other after-school and weekend activities involving over 700 slum children give these kids a purpose beyond their routine lives.

Rithun Harikrishna, a Grade X student in one of the Police Clubs in Chennai Corporation's Redhills area, recently bagged first place in the Sub-Junior Level International Silambam (traditional martial art form) competition, held in Malaysia.





# Frame of Success

Over two decades, Hand in Hand India's child empowerment efforts have touched millions of lives. Behind each number is a child who has regained the right to learn, play, and dream.

## Key Achievements



**370,000+**

children  
mainstreamed  
into schools



**5,000+**

Children  
Learning Centres  
(CLCs)  
established to  
support slow  
learners



**586+**

scholarships  
awarded to  
children from  
single-parent  
and vulnerable  
families



**5,847,261**

family-based  
enterprises  
created through  
588,819 SHGs



**1,500+**

rural children  
given STEM  
access through  
CSR-supported  
digital labs



**30,442**

youth skill trained  
in SDTCs



**1,170**

Panchayats  
transformed into  
Child-Friendly  
Communities

Each figure is a milestone, but together, they paint a vision of childhood regained and futures rebuilt.



HAND IN HAND IN INDIA

**CHAMPION**  
FOR CHILDREN



An Alumnus of the Army

*Meet the CLEP Team*



INDIA  
CELEBRATING  
20  
Years  
of Our Journey  
CHAMPIONS  
OF CHANGE

our Students

*Champions of Change*

# The Next Wave of Changemakers

*Because the future of childhood belongs to the future of India*

## **From Lemons to Lemonade: Chandrasekar's Journey From Dropout to Government School Servant**

Life took a complete U-turn for Chandrasekar from a tribal community, whose family struggled to afford two square meals. However, he went on to become a Junior Assistant in the Agriculture department.

Dropping out of school after Class I seemed like an obvious choice for Chandrasekar, who was barely scraping by in Konerikudisai village, deep in the heart of Tamil Nadu's Tiruvannamalai district. But Hand in Hand India's efforts to identify out-of-school children like Chandrasekar changed everything. Identified during one of the social mobilisation survey, their team spotted him, and through persistent home visits and counselling by field organiser Mr. Mani, Chandrasekar's parents were convinced to give him a second chance. In 2008, Chandrasekar joined the Residential Special Training Centre (RSTC) at Muthukumaranmalai, Vellore district, where he received bridge education, motivation, and structured learning that helped him catch up on foundational skills. After two transformative years at the bridge school, he was reintegrated into a formal school, with ongoing support from Hand in Hand India's initiatives.

Chandrasekar thrived, completing Class 10 and Class 12 with distinction, and went on to pursue a B.Sc. in Mathematics and later earned a B.Ed. degree. Eventually, he landed a government job as a Junior Assistant in the Agriculture Department, after clearing the government Group VI exams, taking home a salary of ₹29,000 a month. Chandrasekar's story is one of resilience and hope, where he turned the "lemons" of adversity into "lemonade" of success, overcoming challenges to achieve his goals and inspire others.

*"I never thought I would return to school, let alone work for the Government. Hand in Hand India not only gave me education but also gave me a purpose."*

*- V Chandrasekar  
Former RSTC student*



## The Child Rights Advocate

When Parimala, at 22, lost her husband to kidney failure, she was staring at an uncertain future. Left to support her family alone, many would have turned inward. Parimala chose a different path, and she not only raised her family but also uplifted her village! She poured her energy into her village in Madurantakam Block, Kancheepuram district (Tamil Nadu), becoming an active member of the Child Rights Protection Committee (CRPC) in 2010.

CRPC members are trained to act as local advocates for children and identify vulnerable families, raise awareness of child rights, prevent school dropouts and connect people to government entitlements. With this training and guidance, Parimala began working closely with her community to address some of its most pressing needs.

Over the years, she has become a trusted advocate for the most vulnerable in the community. Through her efforts, she has helped raise awareness about government welfare and facilitated old-age pensions for 112 elderly individuals and secured a monthly incentive of ₹1,000 for eight differently-abled people in Kumaravadi and Mamandur Panchayats. Parimala's work goes beyond adults as she believes children must be safe and informed. Parimala has been actively involved in creating awareness among village children and conducted multiple sessions explaining to them on how to stay safe, why education matters, and what protections the law offers them.

Today, when children in her village talk about rights, or when an elderly woman collects her pension without fear or rejection, Parimala's impact is visible. Parimala's journey shows how the CRPC model, rooted in local leadership and supported by Hand in Hand India, creates lasting change.

*"I know what it means to feel helpless," Parimala says. "That is why I want every child here to know that they are not alone, they have rights, and that the community will stand by them."*

*- Parimala  
CRPC member*





## Collective Force of Mothers of Samsihariya help Set Up Learning Centres

The remote village of Samsihariya panchayat, once characterised by the eerie silence of the forest, has transformed into a thriving hub of learning, filled with the laughter and chatter of children at the Children Learning Centre (CLC) established with the support of Hand in Hand India. The village, located 30 kilometers from Koderma district headquarters in Jharkhand, is surrounded by forests and predominantly inhabited by the Muslim community. Traditionally, children in the village attended Madrasas for religious education, with limited access to formal schooling.

However, under the Hand in Hand India PCFIC Project, which aims to empower communities and promote education, a Mothers' Collective was formed, leading to the establishment of the CLC. The Mothers' Collective members participated in training sessions on the importance of education and child health, empowering them to prioritise their children's educational needs.

Initially, the children struggled with basic reading and numeracy skills, but after a year of consistent learning at the CLC, they demonstrated significant improvement. Shift in attitude of the guardians, following a one-on-one counselling session by the CLC teacher, Menu Kumari, and Mobiliser, Gaytri Devi, helped increase enrolment into formal schools. A total of 45 children who were previously attending Madrasas were enrolled in Middle School Sitwa Jamuniya. The CLC's innovative approaches, such as monthly Parent-Teacher meetings and Nukkad Natak (street plays), proved successful in raising awareness and promoting education.

Today, parents are thrilled to witness the transformation in their children and express gratitude to Hand in Hand India for bridging the learning gap and mainstreaming their children into formal education. This initiative has empowered the next generation to build a brighter future.

*"We never imagined our children could learn so much and grow with such confidence. Hand in Hand India has given us hope for a brighter future."*

*- Pushpa Devi  
Member of the Mothers' Collective*



## Empowering the Birhors: A Journey From Exclusion to Education

The Transformative Journey of the Birhor Community: In the remote village of Georadih, nestled in the quaint Koderma district of Jharkhand, it is nothing short of a miracle that the Birhor community, an ethnic tribal group, has been mainstreamed into education and government welfare programmes. Known as the Mica City for its historical dominance in mica mining, particularly ruby mica, the district houses the Birhor community, who have long remained disconnected from govt. benefits and faced significant challenges in accessing formal education, with poverty, lack of awareness, and deep-rooted social barriers hindering their progress. However, with the intervention of Hand in Hand India's child welfare initiative, Promoting Child-Friendly Integrated Communities project, a remarkable shift has begun to take place, bringing education, empowerment, and a brighter future to the community's children.

This was possible due to the dedicated grassroots workers, including Malin Birhorni, an Anganwadi (govt. rural child care centre) worker, who played a vital role in convincing hesitant parents to enrol their children in school. Through door-to-door counselling sessions and awareness meetings, the Child Rights Protection Committee (CRPC) members and Anganwadi workers engaged with families that led to a gradual increase in school admissions among the Birhor children.





Building upon the initial enrolment success, a special education programme was organised, to provide mentorship and educational kits to these children, which was a source of motivation and financial support for the families. Parents who were once skeptical about sending their children to school are now actively participating in their academic journey.

The journey of the Birhor children from exclusion to education is a powerful testament to how collective efforts, community engagement, and educational support can bring lasting change.

*“Education has given us hope for a brighter future. We never thought our children could learn so much and grow with such confidence.”*

*– Malin Birhorni  
Anganwadi worker and parent*

# The Way Forward

The lesson is clear: partnerships amplify impact. A single corporate grant can equip thousands of children, while an empowered community can sustain change for generations.

Hand in Hand India believes that the future of childhood depends on weaving together Government & CSR initiatives, community efforts, and civil societies into a united front, where every child has the opportunity to thrive.





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## Head Office

90-A, Nasarathpet Village,  
Opp. Pachaiyappa's Men's College,  
Little Kancheepuram,  
Kancheepuram – 631 501  
Tamil Nadu, India

## Chennai Office

New No.33, Old No.14,  
48th Street, 9th Avenue,  
Ashok Nagar, Chennai – 600 083  
Tamil Nadu, India

 [info@hihindia.org](mailto:info@hihindia.org)



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