

Draft

**Guidelines for Equitable Opportunity to the Socio-Economically
Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in HEIs**

February 2023



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Ministry of Education

Government of India

Expert Committee

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* The UGC sincerely acknowledges feedback and inputs given by Prof. Anil Sutar, TISS, Mumbai, on Guidelines for Equitable Opportunity to the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in HEIs.

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Section One

Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

1.1 Introduction:

Accessibility of quality education to all has been a major challenge in countries all over the world. In our country, there are several disadvantaged groups, such as women, minorities, SCs and STs, who lag behind others in the field of education. Taking all together in the development of the nation is the prime goal of the Government of India. Accordingly, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the need to address the issues of students belonging to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

The students belonging to SEDGs face several challenges and difficulties in accessing quality education because of socio-cultural, economic, and historical reasons. The NEP 2020 has identified people with the following identities as *Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups* (SEDGs) and emphasized their increased participation, particularly in higher education:

(i) Gender Identity:

- Female (Girls and Women make up about half of all SEDGs and, in particular, those belonging to underrepresented groups have multiple disadvantages)
- Transgender.

(ii) Social Backwardness Identity:

- Scheduled Castes (SCs)
- Scheduled Tribes (STs)

(iii) Educational and Economic Backward Identity:

- Non-Creamy Layer among Other Backward Classes (OBCs)
- Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs)
- Students from the vernacular medium schools
- First Generation Learners

(iv) Minority Identity:

- Religious Minorities
- Linguistic Minorities

(v) Persons with Disabilities and Benchmark Disabilities.

- A person with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment,
- A person with not less than forty percent of a specified disability as certified by the certifying authority.

(vi) Vulnerable and Low Socio-economic conditions:

- Migrant communities,
- Low-income households Below Poverty Line (BPL)
- Child beggars and Children in vulnerable situations
- Victims of or children of victims of trafficking
- Students who lost their parents
- Any other group of low socio-economic conditions

(vii) Less-developed, poor-access, and disadvantaged locations:

- Villages and towns
- Tribal Areas /Scheduled Areas as mentioned in the V and VI Schedule under the Constitution of India.
- Slums
- Aspirational Areas with Special Educational Zones (SEZs)
- North East States
- Islands
- Conflict Prone Areas
- Disaster-prone areas, including flood, drought, earthquake, etc.
- Border Areas.

Accomplishing the goals of NEP 2020 is considered necessary to help India addressing effectively the challenges of her commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, particularly the challenges related to achieving SDG-4 (quality education), SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-1 (no poverty), and SDG-8 (decent work and economic growth). These guidelines are meant to ensure that students belonging to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) have a safe and secure environment and equitable access to quality education in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), as specified in the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

1.2 Objectives:

- a) Improving equitable access to quality education for SEDGs through bridge courses, earn-while-learn, and outreach programmes;
- b) Extending and ensuring basic facilities and amenities to SEDGs for inclusive, healthy, safe, and secure environments on campuses; and
- c) Setting up Equal Opportunity Cell for the purpose of sensitization of all stakeholders, policy implementation, monitoring, equalizing access to inclusive quality higher education, ensuring respectful dignity, promoting egalitarian and constitutional values, and grievance redressal in Higher Education Institutions in India.

The following measures are suggested in the NEP 2020 to achieve the objectives:

1. Make admissions processes more inclusive.
2. Make the curriculum more inclusive.
3. Develop *bridge courses* for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.
4. Ensure *sensitization* of faculty, counselors, and students on the gender-identity issue and its inclusion in all aspects of the HEI, including curricula.
5. Strictly enforce all *no-discrimination* and *anti-harassment rules*.
6. Develop a roadmap that contains specific plans for action on increasing participation from SEDGs, including but not limited to the above items.

Section Two

Interventions to make HEIs more Inclusive, Equitable, and Sensitive to SEDGs

There is a need to provide a robust framework to HEIs for formulating measures to make HEIs more inclusive, equitable, and sensitive to students belonging to SEDGs. To facilitate learning for all students, with special emphasis on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), HEIs may undertake appropriate affirmative actions such as a) Bridge Courses, b) Earn-while-Learn, c) Outreach programmes - SEDGs Special Education Zones, and d) Sensitizing Stakeholders of HEIs. Finally, to ensure the working of these measures, primarily for making the HEIs more inclusive, equitable, and sensitive to SEDGs, HEIs shall establish an Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups. A brief account of each of these measures is given on the following pages:

2.1 Bridge Courses:

Bridge courses are helpful, especially for newly admitted students in the transition to studying in higher education institutions. It is aimed at helping the moderate and below moderate level students belonging to the SEDGs at the entry-level to bridge the gap between the subjects studied at the previous level and those to be examined at the entry level of the new academic programme that the students have been admitted to. It provides an adequate foundation in the core subjects so that such students do not have difficulty when the classes commence.

The bridge courses are intended to help the students of SEDGs category perform academically at par with other category students. Such courses are to be conducted every year before the commencement of the semester programme. The Bridge courses are to provide in advance both primary and supplementary knowledge on the advanced subjects taught to these students during the semesters. For this purpose, academic institutions need to identify students who require to undergo the bridge courses, and wherever possible, the bridge courses can be taught in the local languages. The bridge courses should be tailor-made to meet the requirements of SEDG students, and a unique timetable should be prepared to deliver the content.

2.1.1 Objectives of Bridge courses:

1. To help the students to overcome deficiencies in their learning.
2. To help those students with different learning abilities and multiple challenges to perform at par with other students.
3. To act as a buffer for the new entrants.
4. To provide adequate time to the SEDGs students for a smooth transition to hardcore engineering and other professional courses.

5. To provide in advance basic knowledge on core courses to prepare the students for the identified courses, which will commence in the forthcoming semesters.
6. To equip the students with the necessary knowledge and confidence to take on more challenges.

2.1.2 Steps to be taken by Universities/Colleges:

The Universities and Colleges shall undertake some actionable steps to introduce relevant bridge courses. These shall include the following:

1. Bridge courses for students with learning deficiencies and inadequacies. These classes are conducted for students to assist them in achieving expected competencies in subjects. Bridge courses can also be taken from online platforms such as SWAYAM.
2. Orientation courses for freshers. These are preparatory courses such as mathematics, computers, communication skills, accounting, etc., designed to connect a student's previous course. The course student wants to join so that he/she does not have to begin from the start of the course the student wants to take differently from the course he is currently pursuing.

Broader Areas to be focused upon:

- a) The national development concerns, development perspectives, and priorities.
 - b) Connect with the community, world of work, and global society.
 - c) Self-empowerment, motivation, teamwork, and leadership development.
 - d) Elective living in a constructive and creative way with competence and confidence; life skills including elective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical/ scientific thinking, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, equanimity, coping with stress, and resilience.
 - e) Emerging career opportunities and challenges.
 - f) E-learning resources, application of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and social media for making education employable.
3. The infrastructural and other facilities in the HEIs shall be utilized to realize the objectives of the bridge courses.

2.2 Earn-while-Learn

The *Earn-while-Learn* (EWL) scheme is a means to help the SEDGs students earn and support their education and acquire skills and capabilities that would enhance their employability. It attempts to mitigate the economic hardships of learning and enhance the learner's adaptability. Both will improve the quality of education and make it a purposeful endeavour. It provides the students opportunities to develop their personality, gain technical skills and build their entrepreneurial ability, which would help them take up professional assignments relatively quickly. Under this scheme, opportunities for part-time engagement are provided to needy students. The indicative list of such engagement opportunities may include working on research projects with an assistantship, Library assignments, Computer services, Data entry, laboratory assistants, etc.

The effectiveness of any learn-and-earn program depends on its adherence to four foundational pillars: academic rigor, relevant work experience, student financial support, and stakeholder investment in learn-and-earn programs. The pillars are held in place by a commitment to ensuring accountability, giving students the opportunity for career exploration and professional development, and conferring credentials.

2.2.1 Benefits of the Earn-while-Learn Scheme:

Some of the benefits that the students may access through the Earn-while-Learn scheme include the following:

1. Enhancement of employability skills and career preparedness.
2. The *Earn-while-Learn Scheme* initiative will help to reduce the dropout rate.
3. The proper and effective implementation of the scheme will further minimize their parents' burden of their education expenses.
4. This initiative will have a positive impact on the student's career. On one hand, students are earning some extra money, while on the other, they are getting work experience and hands-on training while studying, something that needs to be encouraged in our education system.
5. Acquisition of work experience and hands-on practice during learning.
6. Providing means of education to socio-economically disadvantaged students.
7. Make students more resourceful due to their work experience and acquire job skills.
8. Open various career opportunities to take better jobs in the future and enhance employment prospects.
9. Increase networking possibilities for the institution and the students.
10. Students acquire the requisite competence and attitude etc.
11. Adds value to the resume of students.

2.2.2 Opportunities:

HEIs may provide various part-time engagement opportunities to the enrolled students in any academic departments of the HEIs within the campus. The Head/Director/Coordinator of Academic Departments having eligible students for this scheme should prepare a pool of such candidates in consultation with Dean and Equal opportunity Cell and get it approved by a competent authority, i.e., Vice Chancellor/ Principal, for each academic session.

2.2.3 Remuneration:

The rate of remuneration for each of the students will be a consolidated amount on an hourly basis for the part-time service they render, a maximum of 20 hours per week, 20 days per month. The payment may be made on an actual basis. The services of the student will be rendered after class hours.

2.2.4 Steps to be taken by Universities/Colleges:

- a. Institutions have to ensure flexibility to the students for acquiring knowledge and skills essential to earn a living.
- b. Identify the types of work engagement on the campus that can be taken up by students in part-time mode.
- c. Publicize the "Earn while Learn" opportunities widely.
- d. Draw a transparent selection process. Priority may be given to needy students.
- e. Institutions must collaborate with Government and Non-Government agencies for funding or seek projects for implementing the scheme.
- f. Provide necessary weightage to the scheme by including it as a criterion for assessment and accreditation.
- g. Students engaged in "Earn while Learn" may be issued a certificate.

2.3 Outreach Programme - SEDGs Special Education Zones:

An outreach program aims to help, uplift, and support those who are deprived of certain services and rights. It involves giving learning, social planning, health support, and other projects for their welfare.

Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds require encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education. Universities and colleges should strive to provide services such as language translation, recording services, and assistive technologies. HEIs need to mobilize resources to carry out this effectively. Professional, academic, and career counselling is to be made available to all the students; also counsellors to ensure the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of the students.

Aspirational areas are those areas that have a larger proportion of SEDGs. There are geographical locations in the country that have been identified as Aspirational Districts which require special interventions to promote their educational development. NEP 2020 recommended those regions of the country with large populations from educationally-disadvantaged SEDGs which should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum extent through additional concerted efforts in order to truly transform the educational landscape.

2.3.1 Steps to be taken by the Universities/ Colleges:

- Institutions have to ensure students' flexibility for outreach programmes.
- Guidelines and principles relating to implementing the outreach programmes must be prepared.
- Universities and colleges have to design the curriculum to embed outreach programmes.
- Institutions must collaborate with Government and Non-Government agencies to conduct such outreach programmes.

2.4 Sensitizing HEIs on Challenges related to SEDGs:

Appropriate sensitization programmes are introduced and regularly organized for all teachers, administrators, functionaries, and students of HEIs, so that the latter become more open to valuing the relevance of inclusive policies such as reservation policy, etc. There is a need to adhere to the principles of inclusion and equity at all levels of the HEIs' engagement with the SEDGs students, and it requires more sensitivity to the challenges faced by the SEDGs students, particularly concerning their self-respect, self-esteem, and dignity.

Section Three

Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC)

All HEIs shall set up Equal Opportunity Cell to ensure opportunities for inclusive, equal and quality higher education to the SEDGs students. The Equal Opportunity Cell shall function as a statutory umbrella body over the existing Cells, such as the SC/ST Cell, OBC Cell, or any other Cell, without any hindrance or interference to the functioning and mandated activities of the latter.

The Equal Opportunity Cell within every HEIs shall protect the constitutionally guaranteed rights, dignity, safety, and security of all individuals belonging to the SEDGs and also ensure them equalizing access and opportunities to pursue higher education with the help of the existing statutory bodies such as SC/ST Cell and OBC Cell.

3.1 Objectives of Equal Opportunity Cell:

1. To protect all the constitutional rights of the SEDGs students.
2. To ensure that the HEIs are inclusive, safe, and secure for the SEDGs students.
3. To provide socio-emotional and academic support and mentoring for the students belonging to the SEDGs through proper counselling and mentoring programmes.
4. To ensure proper implementation and monitoring of bridge courses designed by the HEIs to benefit SEDGs students.
5. To ensure implementation of all such programmes designed and developed by HEIs to increase the participation of SEDGs students in academic activities.
6. To ensure implementation of all policies, including reservation policies and various schemes, programmes, and guidelines of the Govt. of India.
7. To ensure that the HEIs develop appropriate outreach programmes to help the SEDGs students from Special Education Zones (SEZs) to avail the various opportunities of educational/academic programmes of HEIs.
8. Ensure proper implementation of all laws against discrimination and atrocities against the SCs and STs.
9. To circulate, publicize, facilitate, and monitor the implementation of the UGC guidelines and instructions issued from time to time in favour of SEDGs.

10. To redress the grievances and complaints of the SEDGs students within 15 days through a Grievances Redressal Committee (GRC) without compromising the safety and dignity of the complainant.

3.2 Functions of Equal Opportunity Cell:

1. To co-ordinate with other existing cells and statutory bodies of the HEIs and enable implementation of the existing schemes and provisions, including scholarships and fellowships of the Govt. of India and respective States.
2. To ensure the implementation of bridge courses, earn-while-learn schemes, and outreach programmes designed and developed by HEIs for SEDGs.
3. To provide socio-economic, academic, and emotional support and mentoring for such students through proper counselling and mentoring programmes.
4. To ensure sensitization of faculty, staff, counsellors, and students on the gender-identity issue and their inclusion in all aspects of the HEI, including making curricula gender and ability inclusive.
5. To explore and generate funds from various sources like Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) and Alumni to provide more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs to mitigate opportunity costs and fees for pursuing higher education.
6. Coordinate with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to raise awareness about the implementation of various policies for inclusive and equitable quality higher education.
7. To work as a 'Single Window' for students belonging to SEDGs for their grievances, basic needs, amenities, facilities, welfare measures, and scholarships and fellowships.
8. To upload guidelines, facilities, welfare, and safety measures on HEI's portal and maintain such records to review and monitor amenities and basic facilities for a safe and secure environment for SEDGs.
9. To circulate, publicize, and facilitate existing welfare schemes like – Remedial, NET, entry into services, and residential Coaching for SC/ST/OBC (non-creamy layer), Minority Community, and PwD Students.
10. To establish a team of counsellors, social workers, and faculty members to provide emotional and social support to SEDGs to adapt to the environment of the HEI.
11. To focus on overall personality and skill development, including professional and soft skills, so as to ensure enhancing the student employability.
12. To organize periodic meetings and to monitor the progress of various schemes and all the HEIs may prepare the database.

13. To assess the needs of SEDGs and make necessary recommendations to the authorities of the institutions.
14. To make faculty, staff, students, and service professionals aware of facilities available for SEDGs.
15. To sensitize all the students to bring an attitudinal change towards SEDGs. Students should accept and involve SEDGs in curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities in the HEIs.
16. To hold regular meetings with SEDG students to check their grievances and also meet with management/authorities of HEIs to facilitate discussion of the grievances of SEDG students and maintain the confidentiality of deliberations and data.
17. To review, monitor, and ensure disposal of all grievances within 15 days.

3.3 Governance of Equal Opportunity Cell:

The Equal Opportunity Cell shall have the following composition:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. Dean or Director of Equal Opportunity Cell to be nominated by the Head of the HEI | ...Chairperson |
| 2. A senior faculty member to be nominated by Vice Chancellor / Principal | ...Member |
| 3. Liaison Officer of Equal Opportunity Cell | ...Member |
| 4. In-charge of Internal Complaint Committee | ...Member |
| 5. Coordinator/Director of IQAC | ...Member |
| 6. Women Representative to be nominated by the Head of the HEI | ...Member |
| 7. Students' Representative to be nominated by the Head of the HEI. | ...Member |
| 8. Assistant Registrar/ Administrative Officer to be nominated by Head of HEI | ...Member Secretary |

Glossary

Definitions/ Key-terms

The definitions mentioned in these guidelines are under those appearing in the relevant Gazette notifications, Government of India, and guidelines notified by the University Grants Commission, unless the context otherwise requires, as under:

1. The **Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)** are those who, for historical reasons and the causes of their prevailing disadvantaged social, economic, educational, vocational, and locational conditions, cannot have equal access to the various facilities and opportunities available for higher education.
2. The category "**Economically Weaker Section (EWS)**" refers to those sections of society that are not covered under the scheme of reservation for SC/ST/OBC and whose gross annual income from all sources (as per the existing criteria) is below Rs.8 lakhs for the financial year preceding the year of application for admission/recruitment.
3. The category "**Other Backward Classes**" refers to the class or classes of citizens who are socially and educationally backward and are so determined and listed by the Central Government or by State Governments in the respective list of OBCs.
4. As per the existing notification, the Creamy Layer status of an OBC student is determined based on the income status of their parents. Hence, under the SEDGs, eligible OBC students are those in the "non-Creamy layer," which means the parents' income of an OBC student has been below Rs.8 lakhs per annum during the last three consecutive years. (Ref. DoPT O.M. No 36033/1.2013-Estt. (Res.) dated 13th September 2017 (which may be amended from time to time).
5. "**Persons with disabilities**" means a person with a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders a person's complete and adequate participation in society equally with others, as defined under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

6. **"Persons with benchmark disabilities"** means a person with not less than forty percent of a specified disability where a specified disability has not been defined in measurable terms and includes persons with disabilities where a specified disability has been defined in measurable terms, as certified by the certifying authority.
7. **"Scheduled Castes"** means the Scheduled Castes, notified under Article 341 of the Constitution of India.
8. **"Scheduled Tribes"** means the Scheduled Tribes, notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India.
9. **"Special Education Zones (SEZs)"** means those aspirational areas containing larger numbers of SEDGs.
10. **"SEDGs Budget"** means the separate budget generated by HEIs from their own sources/CSR/Voluntary/Donations for the welfare and benefit of students belonging to SEDGs.