Out-of-School Children in India

What is the issue?

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- The official numbers of out-of-school children in India are contradictory in different reports.
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- A recent data in this regard highlights the variations in out-of-school children proportion as well as the reasons behind.
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What is the contradiction?

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- The 2011 Census reported the number of out-of-school children in the 5-17 age group as 8.4 crore.
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- This stands in contrast to a survey commissioned in 2014 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
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- As per this, the number of out-of-school children in the 6-13 age group was only 60.64 lakh.
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- This is a gross underestimation as it is unlikely that the number drastically came down from 2011 to 2014.
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- Notably, there were no significant changes in objective conditions so as to bring such a reduction.
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What is the recent estimate?

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- The number of out-of-school children in India was recently calculated afresh.
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- This was on the basis of the 71st round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) carried out in 2014.
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- Children of the 6-18 age group were taken into account.
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- It was found that out-of-school children in this age group were more than 4.5 crore in the country.
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- This is around 16% of the children in this age group.
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- **States** - In some of the big States, about one-fifth of the children in this age group were out of school.
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- These include Odisha (20.6%), UP (21.4%), Gujarat (19.1%), Bihar (18.6%), etc as also MP, Rajasthan and WB.
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- In Kerala, Goa, Sikkim, HP and TN, the proportion was lower than the national average.
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- **Region** - Out-of-school children proportion was around 17% in rural India as against 13% in urban India.
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- In rural areas, the proportion of out-of-school girls (18.3%) was higher than of boys (16.3%).
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- **Groups** - The proportion of children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) was the highest.
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- This was followed by Other Backward Classes (OBCs).
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- Among religious groups, the proportion of Muslims was as high as 24.1% in rural areas and 24.7% in urban areas.
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- **In all**, the data show that out-of-school children came mostly from the rural areas.
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- Also, a high proportion of them are SCs, STs, Muslims and from other economically backward communities.
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- These children were mostly from low-income, landless and marginal families.

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- Most of these children's parents were uneducated and mostly casual labourers.
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What is the Telangana Report's finding?

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- The Telangana Social Development Report, 2018 brought out key patterns in this regard.
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- The prejudice against educating girls that is prevalent in India is a major reason for children being out of school.
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- According to the report, a proportionately larger percentage of girls than boys was not enrolled.
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- In the rural areas, the gender gap on this count was as high as 13 percentage points.
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- A relatively lower percentage of girls was found going to high fee-charging private schools.
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- Similarly, a relatively lower percentage of girls took private coaching, involving additional costs.
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- A much higher proportion of girls than boys dropped out of school after Class 10.
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- Notably, after this, education is not necessarily free.
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- In Telangana, the average expenditure on the education of girls was less than that for boys.
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What are the driving factors?

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- **Work** - A key reason for boys to drop out of school was to take up jobs to supplement the family earning.

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- For girls, it was the compulsion to participate in household work.
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- Under RTE and Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Acts, these children fall under 'child labour' category.
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- Ultimately, the largest number of child labourers in the world is in India.
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- **Policies** - The shortfalls in implementing all the provisions of the RTE Act within the time limit is a key reason.
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- E.g. the Act provided for the availability of a school
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i. at a distance of 1 km from the child's residence at the primary level
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ii. at 3 km from the child's residence at the upper primary level
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- If implemented, a major reason for drop-out (distance of school) would have been eliminated.
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What does it call for?

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- A large number of children being out of school is a matter of serious concern to the country.
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- This is particularly even after the RTE Act being in place, and elevating RTE as a fundamental right.
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- Implementation of provisions of the RTE Act in its true spirit is the need of the hour.
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- Besides, an important reason for drop-out is the socio-economic conditions of the parents.
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- There are clear evidences of a positive correlation between economic

incentives and a lower drop-out.
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- This calls for a more comprehensive approach that is not reflected in the RTE Act.
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- An important provision which ought to have been in the RTE Act is financial support to poor parents.
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- Awareness generation on the importance of school education and on the fact that education is now a legal right is essential.
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- Ironically, education is both the means and the end for this.
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Source: The Hindu

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