

India's Higher Education Sector

A Decade of Growth, Access, and Inclusion

Posted On: 30 AUG 2026 10:15AM by PIB Delhi

Building India's Knowledge Ecosystem: A Decade of Progress

Higher education is a cornerstone of India's journey towards a **knowledge-based economy** and a key pillar of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**. The policy envisions an education system that promotes holistic, multidisciplinary learning and advances the goals of **SDG 4. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4** focuses on *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*. The Ministry of Education conducts an annual survey of Higher Education Institutions in India.

The **All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)**, conducted annually by the Ministry of Education, provides a comprehensive evidence base on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country. The data helps track the progress of higher education reforms under NEP 2020, identify emerging gaps, and inform policy responses.

A Growing Higher Education Footprint

According to AISHE reports, India's higher education network has expanded significantly over the decade.

- The number of universities increased from **760** in 2014–15 to **1,289** in 2023–24, representing a growth of 69.6%.
- The number of colleges rose from **38,498** to **48,246**, an increase of **25.3%**.
- Standalone institutions increased from **12,276** to **15,221**, registering about **24%** growth.

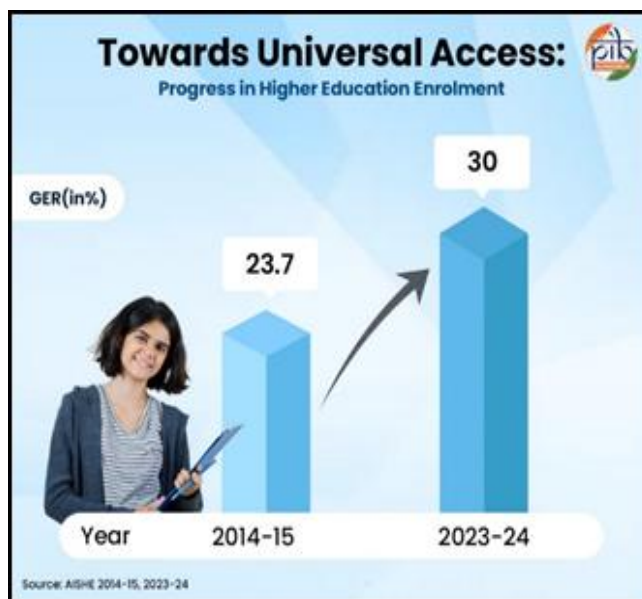


This expansion reflects a widening institutional base and greater capacity to serve learners across the country. It has strengthened the reach of higher education, supported broader participation, and contributed to building a **more accessible, diverse, and inclusive knowledge ecosystem for India's future**.

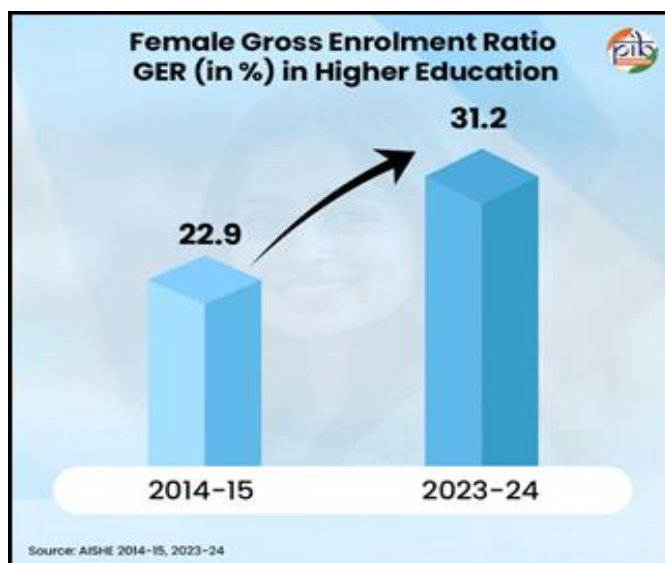
Increasing Student Enrolment: Advancing Equity and Inclusion

Higher education enrolment in India has risen steadily over the past decade, growing **31.5%** from 3.42 crore students in 2014–15 to **4.50 crore** in 2023–24.

- The **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** in higher education rose from **23.7%** in 2014–15 to **29.5%** in 2022–23, and further to **30%** in 2023–24. This steady increase reflects growing access to and participation in higher education, supporting NEP 2020's target of raising the GER to 50% by 2035.



- From **2014-15** to **2023-24**, level-wise percentage increase in total enrolments was:
 - Ph.D 1.17 lakh to **3.43 lakh** (192.89%); Post Graduate 38.53 lakh to **57.85 lakh** (50.15%); Under Graduate 2.71 crore to **3.45 crore** (27.27%);
 - Diploma 25.08 lakh to **33.15 lakh** (32.22%); Certificate 1.70 lakh to **2.08 lakh** (22.55%); Integrated 1.41 lakh to **5.69 lakh** (301.36%).



- Female enrolment in higher education has witnessed steady growth over the past decade. It grew by **42.2%**, rising from **1.57 crore** in 2014–15 to **2.24 crore** in 2023–24, outpacing the growth in total enrolment during the decade. The number of female students enrolled in various courses in **2023-24** was:

- Ph.D: **1.71 lakh**; Post-Graduate: **32.53 lakh**; Under Graduate: **1.71 crore**
- PG Diploma: **91,332**; Diploma: **13.27 lakh**; Certificate: **1.10 lakh**, and Integrated: **2.73 lakh**.
- Female GER increased from **22.9%** in **2014–15** to **31.2%** in **2023–24**, surpassing male GER (**28.9%**) for the **seventh** consecutive year.
- Higher education out-turn increased from **88.28 lakh** in 2014–15 to over **1.09 crore** in 2023–24 a **24.06%** increase. The growth reflects improved programme completion, enhanced retention, rising enrolment, and expanded institutional capacity. Supported by government initiatives, this trend highlights progress in access, equity, quality, and performance in higher education.

Higher education out-turn refers to the total number of students who pass out of higher education institutions in a given academic year.

- **Gender Parity Index (GPI)** in higher education improved significantly, rising from **0.92** in **2014–15** to **1.08** in **2023–24**. GPI for the SC category increased from **0.91** to **1.11**, while ST category GPI rose from **0.81** to **1.08** during the same period.
- The rising GPI points to increasing parity favoring females. The progress highlights the impact of government initiatives in promoting **equity**, **inclusion**, and balanced **participation** in higher education.

Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of GER for females to GER for males, reflecting equitable participation of females in the education system.

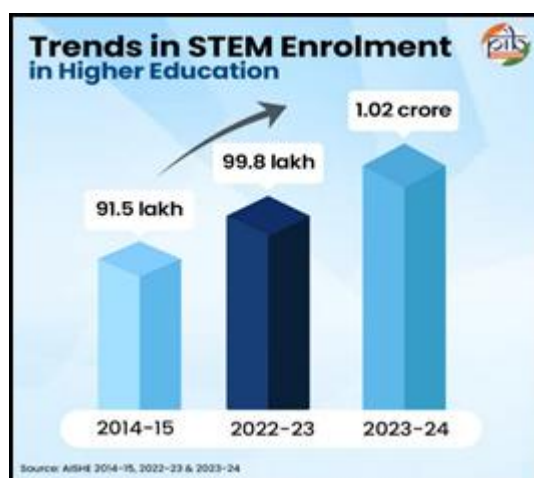
- A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes.
 - A GPI between 0 and 1 typically indicates a disparity favoring males.
 - A GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity favoring females.
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- The share of SC enrolment rose from **13.44%** in 2014–15 to **15.5%** in 2023–24 in total enrolment. During the same period, the share of ST enrolment increased from **4.8%** to **6.4%**. OBC participation climbed from **32.8%** to **40.1%**, registering the largest increase in enrolment share among all social categories.
 - The **GER** for SC students increased from **18.9%** in **2014–15** to **27.8%** in **2023–24**. For the ST students, it increased from **13.5%** in **2014–15** to **22.8%** in **2023–24**. Increasing participation of students from SC, ST and OBC categories reflects growing inclusivity in higher education.
 - **Persons with Benchmark Disability (PwBD)** enrolment increased from **64,298** in 2014–15 to **88,816** in 2022–23, registering a growth of **38.1%**. Male and female enrolment grew by **54.4%** and **19.0%**, respectively, during this period.
 - In 2023–24, **54,080** PwBD students were enrolled, including **34,080 males** and **20,000 females**. Higher male enrolment among PwBD points to a persistent gender imbalance in access to higher education. This suggests that improvements in access have not translated equally across genders.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Enrolment

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) enrolments in higher education have increased steadily over the past decade.

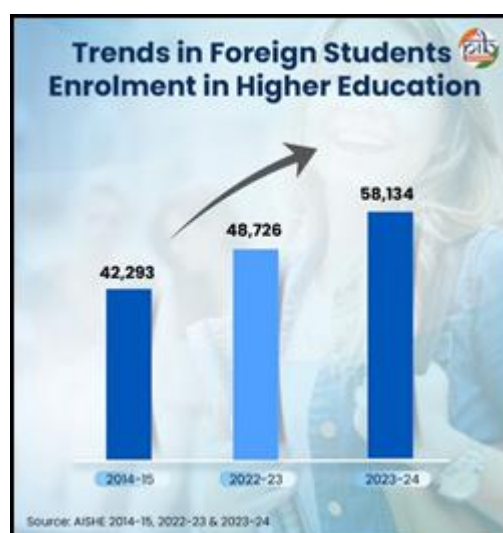
Total enrolments increased from **91.5 lakh** in 2014–15 to **1.02 crore** in 2023–24, representing an overall increase of approximately **11.5%** over the period.

The growth reflects expanding institutional capacity and sustained student interest in STEM disciplines, driven by government initiatives, digital technologies, innovation, research, and employment opportunities strengthening India's knowledge economy.



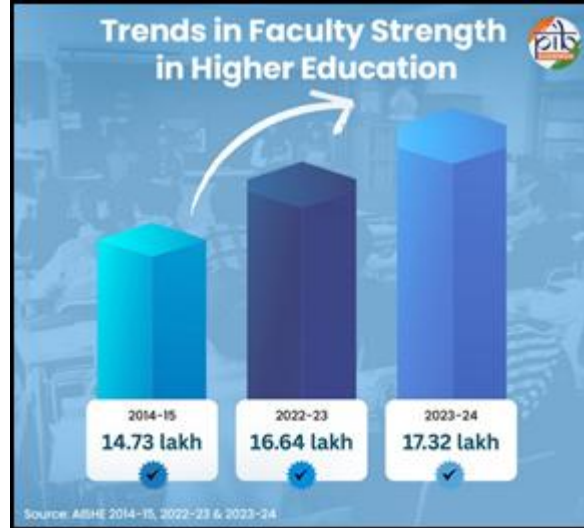
Foreign Student Enrolment in Higher Education

- Foreign student enrolment rose from **42,293** in 2014–15 to **58,134** in 2023–24, an increase of approximately **37.5%** over the past decade — reflecting India's growing appeal as a destination for higher learning among international students.
- This points to the growing internationalisation of higher education, enhanced academic collaborations and global recognition of Indian institutions.



Faculty Growth in Higher Education

The number of teachers in higher education increased from **14.73 lakh** in 2014–15 to **17.32 lakh** in 2023–24, representing an overall increase of **2.59 lakh teachers**, or approximately **17.6%** growth during the period.



- The absolute number of female teachers grew by **36.7%** between 2014–15 and 2023–24, reflecting growing equity in employment opportunities for women in the sector.
- In both 2022–23 and 2023–24, the share of male teachers in the total teaching workforce remained higher than that of female teachers.
- In 2022-23, the share of female teachers was **44.3%**. It grew marginally to **44.9%** in 2023-24.

Infrastructure facilities

Between 2014–15 and 2023–24, infrastructure facilities in higher education institutions have improved considerably. Physical and digital infrastructure, green infrastructure and separate amenities for women and PwBD have been developed across institutions. In 2023–24:

- 94% of universities, 95% of colleges, and 91% of standalone institutions had a playground.
- 98% of universities, 98% of colleges, and 98% of standalone institutions had a library facility.
- 89% of universities, 85% of colleges, and 94% of standalone institutions had a laboratory.

In addition, most universities, colleges, and standalone institutions were also equipped with facilities such as health centres, skill development and computer centres, auditoriums, and conference halls.

Towards a Future-Ready Higher Education Ecosystem

India’s higher education sector has expanded significantly over the past decade, with growth in institutions, enrolment, faculty strength and student out-turn. Improvements in Gross Enrolment Ratio, women’s participation, gender parity, and inclusion of SC, ST and other disadvantaged groups reflect enhanced access and equity. Rising enrolment in STEM and international students indicates the strengthening of India's knowledge ecosystem. Together, these achievements highlight the impact of NEP 2020 in promoting quality, inclusion, and excellence.

References

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