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A Shrinking Safety Net

Andhra Pradesh's pension rolls have fallen by nearly 3 lakh in two years — while serious coverage gaps persist in the remote Adivasi interior

Focus: Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) & Parvathipuram Manyam districts | 22 July 2026

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KEY FINDINGS

1. The net is shrinking, and the door to new enrolment is shut. Andhra Pradesh's pension rolls—the number of pensions sanctioned for the month—fell from 65,18,496 in July 2024 to 62,19,807 in July 2026, a reduction of 2,98,689, or nearly 3 lakh pensions. During the period covered by this brief, applications under the regular categories were not accepted and no fresh pensions were sanctioned. The freeze on fresh sanctions, however, began earlier: no new pensions under the regular categories have been sanctioned since January 2024, beginning under the previous government and continuing throughout the present government's tenure. The only significant additions were spouse pensions transferred to widows of deceased pensioners.

2. The announced expansion of widow pensions has not materialised, while safeguards against wrongful cancellation remain weak. [In April 2026, Society for Elimination of rural poverty (SERP), government of Andhra Pradesh estimated that about 1.53 lakh widows qualified for inclusion], and the government announced that all eligible entitlement holders would be sanctioned pensions in a single phase, with disbursals beginning in June. However, these pensions had not been added even by July 2026. There also appears to be no transparent, pension-specific process through which a beneficiary can locally challenge a cancellation and receive a reasoned decision.

3. ASR presents the sharpest territorial gap, while Manyam shows how district averages can conceal internal inequalities. ASR, the state's most heavily Adivasi and one of its most developmentally disadvantaged districts, records the sixth-lowest pension-to-ration-card ratio among the 27 comparable district units, at 39.64%, even though ST residents qualify for old-age pensions ten years earlier. Parvathipuram Manyam ranks first at the district level, showing that the pattern is not uniform. Yet within Manyam, the mandals with the highest ST population shares do not record correspondingly greater pension reach, while a non-Scheduled Area mandal stands far above them.

For many households in Andhra Pradesh's Adivasi belt, this pension is among the few regular and predictable sources of income available to them. What follows is the story of a safety net that is quietly contracting—with fewer people on the rolls, no regular new enrolment, and persistent coverage gaps in remote Adivasi areas.

Methodology note: "Pension rolls" refers to the number of pensions sanctioned for the relevant month on the Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions portal, not the number actually disbursed. The pension-to-ration-card ratio is calculated by dividing sanctioned pensions by ration cards and multiplying by 100. Since pensions are ordinarily restricted to one per household, the ratio provides a useful proxy for comparing pension reach, but it is not an exact eligibility-based coverage rate. The July 2026 portal reports 28 administrative units. After recombining Polavaram with ASR to reflect the earlier district configuration, this analysis uses 27 comparable district units. The statewide comparison uses July 2026 data; the latest mandal-level data available were from June 2025 for ASR and January 2026 for Parvathipuram Manyam.

Part I — The net is shrinking, and the door is shut

Between July 2024 and July 2026, the number of pensions sanctioned in Andhra Pradesh fell from **65,18,496 to 62,19,807**—a reduction of **2,98,689, or nearly 3 lakh pensions**.

Period	Pensions sanctioned

July 2024	65,18,496
July 2026	62,19,807
Net decline	**2,98,689 (4.6%)**

Table 1. *Statewide change in pensions sanctioned for July; source: Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions Portal.*

No new pensions under the regular categories have been sanctioned during the present government's tenure covered by this brief, beginning in July 2024. The freeze, however, predates the change in government: no fresh pensions had been sanctioned from January 2024 onwards, including during the final months of the previous administration.

The only meaningful additions to the rolls were **spouse pensions** transferred to women whose pensioner husbands had died. These transfers did not expand pension coverage to new households; they continued an existing household entitlement in the surviving spouse's name. A one-time drive in July 2025 added roughly 89 thousand such transfers. Apart from this spouse-pension transfer drive, the overall number of sanctioned pensions continued to decline.

Some of those left out were widows waiting to be brought into the pension net. In April 2026, the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Government of Andhra Pradesh, estimated that about 1.53 lakh widows qualified for inclusion. The government announced that all eligible entitlement holders would be sanctioned pensions in a single phase, with disbursals beginning in June. However, these pensions had not been added even by July 2026. This is particularly significant because regular applications remained closed, leaving eligible widows with no other route into the programme.

Disability pensions require separate attention. During the 2025 disability re-verification exercise, entitlement holders were required to undergo reassessment, but concerns arose regarding the transparency of the process, communication of the assessed disability percentage, and the availability of clear appeal routes. For people with severe disabilities—particularly those living in remote Adivasi habitations—travelling to assessment centres can itself become a major barrier. Any future re-verification should provide adequate notice, communicate assessment results and reasons in writing, ensure accessible local appeals, and arrange home-based assessments or mobile medical camps for those unable to travel.

People removed from the pension rolls also appear to lack a transparent, pension-specific process through which they can locally challenge a cancellation and receive a reasoned decision. A recent Andhra Pradesh High Court case illustrates why such safeguards are necessary. In May 2026, the Court directed officials to restore the pensions of five entitlement holders in Srikakulam district and clear their pending arrears. The Court criticised the cancellation process for failing to follow due process and noted serious irregularities, including notices that appeared to have been issued before the complaint on which the action was purportedly based. It also emphasised that pensions are a form of social security linked to the dignified life of vulnerable people, rather than a charitable payment. While the case does not establish the statewide scale of wrongful cancellations, it demonstrates the need for credible safeguards and an accessible appeal mechanism. **The findings of this brief should also be read against the backdrop of this judgment.**

That shut door—combined with weak safeguards against wrongful cancellation—is the hinge of this report. A pension system that accepts no new applications under the regular categories, while sanctioned pensions continue to decline and affected entitlement holders lack an accessible appeal process, does not fail everyone equally. It freezes existing inequalities in place—and the people outside the net were never equally served to begin with. That is the second, deeper story.

Part II — Coverage gaps in remote Scheduled Area mandals

Scheduled Tribe (ST) individuals qualify for the old-age pension at 50, ten years earlier than the general eligibility age of 60. Both districts examined here contain extensive areas notified under the Fifth Schedule, which provides additional constitutional protections for Adivasi communities. Given the earlier eligibility age for ST residents and the greater vulnerability of many Adivasi households, these areas should not be falling behind in pension reach.

The sharpest concern is ASR, the state's most heavily Adivasi district, which records one of the lowest pension-to-ration-card ratios among the 27 comparable district units. This is particularly striking given the earlier pension eligibility age for ST residents. The relationship between Adivasi population and pension reach is not uniform: Parvathipuram Manyam, which also has a substantial Adivasi population and extensive Scheduled Areas, records the highest district-level ratio. However, its strong overall position conceals significant internal variation. Mandal-level comparisons in both districts show that several remote, high-Adivasi and Scheduled Area mandals fall behind better-connected areas.

2.1 At the extreme: the most Adivasi district sits near the bottom

ASR—the state's most heavily Adivasi district and one of its most developmentally disadvantaged, as reflected in its inclusion in NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme—records a pension-to-ration-card ratio of **39.64%**, the sixth-lowest among the 27 comparable district units used in this analysis. Given that ST residents qualify for old-age pensions a full decade earlier, ASR's low position is particularly notable.

S.No	District	Pension-to-Ration-Card Ratio (%)
1	Visakhapatnam	29.74
2	Kurnool	33.57
3	NTR	37.41
4	Nandyal	38.33
5	West Godavari	39.05
6	**Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) ★**	**39.64**
7	Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore	40.28
8	Ananthapuramu	40.32
9	Eluru	40.54
10	Kakinada	40.63
11	East Godavari	40.67
12	Palnadu	41.27
13	Guntur	41.60
14	Markapuram	41.72
15	Prakasam	41.83
16	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema	42.18
17	YSR Kadapa	42.22
18	Tirupati	43.01
19	Annamayya	43.17
20	Krishna	43.61
21	Sri Sathya Sai	44.54
22	Srikakulam	45.32
23	Vizianagaram	45.87
24	Anakapalli	46.10
25	Bapatla	46.57
26	Chittoor	48.13
27	**Parvathipuram Manyam**	**48.45**

Table 2. *Pension-to-ration-card ratio by district unit, July 2026. ASR (★) in red; Parvathipuram Manyam in green. The portal reports 28 administrative units; after Polavaram is recombined with ASR to reflect the earlier district configuration, the analysis uses 27 comparable units. Source: Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions Portal and AEPDS portal.*

Parvathipuram Manyam's position at the top of the district-unit ranking shows that Adivasi demography alone does not determine pension reach. The within-district comparisons below therefore examine ASR and Parvathipuram Manyam separately.

2.2 Inside ASR: some of the most Adivasi and remote mandals fall behind

Within ASR, the contrast can be seen by placing two mandals side by side. **G. Madugula**, with an ST population of about **93% (2011 Census)**, recorded a pension-to-ration-card ratio of **38.1%**. **Paderu**, the district headquarters, has a lower ST share of about **82.5%** and recorded **40.9%**. Despite its greater Adivasi concentration and remoteness, G. Madugula records a lower ratio than Paderu. This is an illustrative comparison within the broader mandal-level distribution shown below, and it shows how greater vulnerability does not necessarily translate into better pension reach.

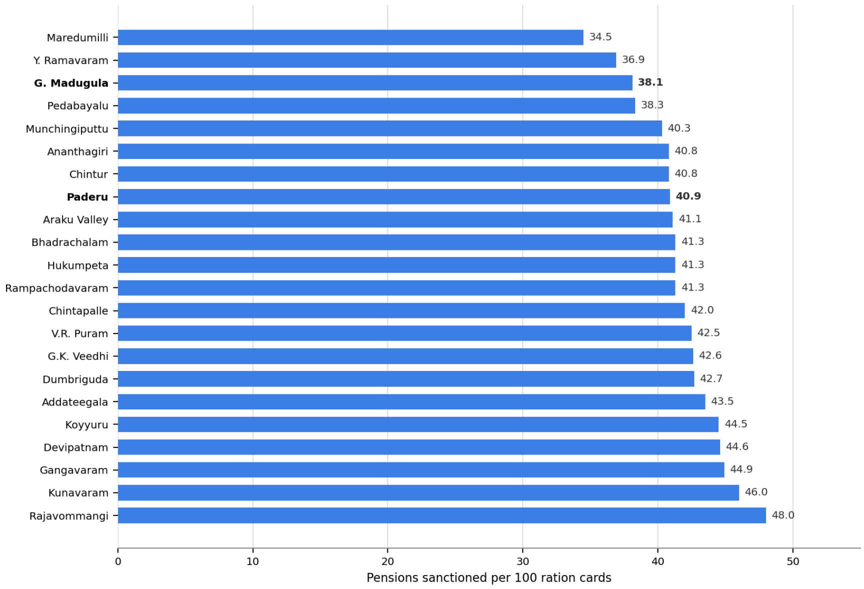

Figure 1. *Pension-to-ration-card ratio by mandal in ASR district, June 2025. Source: Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions Portal and AEPDS portal.*

2.3 Inside Manyam: the highest-ST mandals do not have the highest pension reach

Parvathipuram Manyam's position at the top of the district-unit ranking conceals a striking contradiction: the mandals with the district's highest ST population shares do not record correspondingly higher pension-to-ration-card ratios, while a non-Scheduled Area mandal performs far better. The January 2026 mandal-level data show that:

- **Seethampeta and Gummalakshmipuram**, where ST residents constitute about **90.9% and 86.7%** of the population respectively, record pension-to-ration-card ratios of **48.1% and 48.2%**—close to, but slightly below, the district average of 48.45%.
- **Kurupam**, with an ST population share of about **72.0%**, records an even lower pension ratio of **46.4%**.
- **Pachipenta and Salur**, both of which contain notified Scheduled Area villages, lie at the bottom of the district distribution, with ratios of **43.4% and 43.1%** respectively.
- By contrast, **Seethanagaram**, which does not contain notified Scheduled Area villages, tops the district at **60.8%**—more than 12 percentage points above Seethampeta and Gummalakshmipuram, and over 17 percentage points above Salur and Pachipenta.

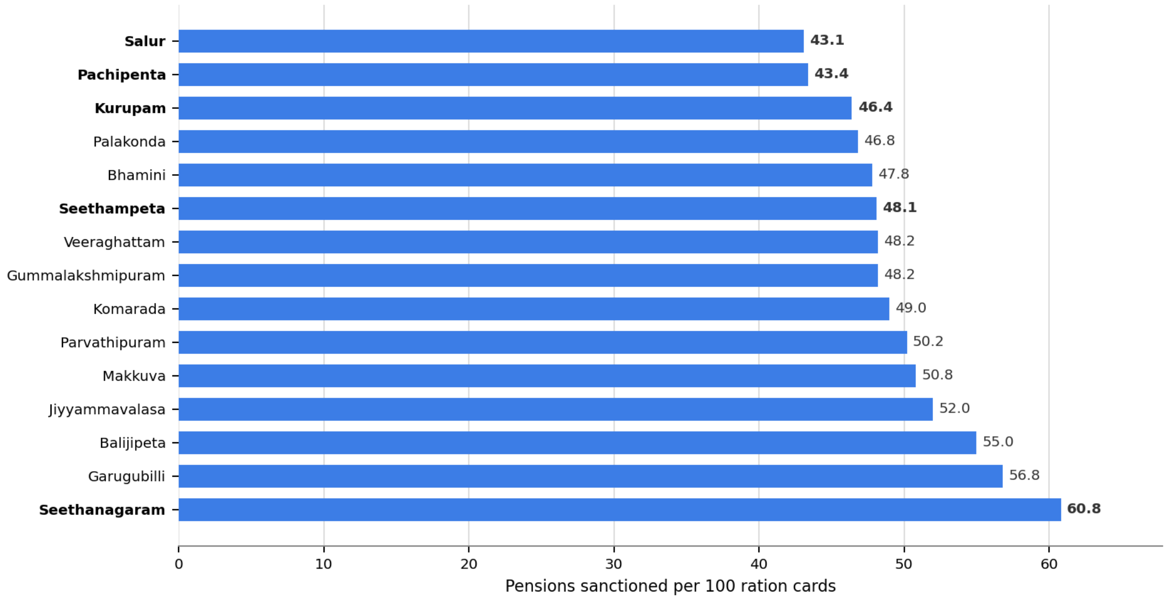

Figure 2. *Pension-to-ration-card ratio by mandal in Parvathipuram Manyam district, January 2026. Source: Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions Portal and AEPDS portal.*

Scheduled Area classification is based on the notified status of villages within each mandal.

The contradiction is therefore clear: the district's most heavily Adivasi mandals, where ST residents qualify for old-age pensions ten years earlier, do not record correspondingly greater pension reach. Their ratios remain around or below the district average, while a non-Scheduled Area mandal stands far above them. Parvathipuram Manyam's strong district-level position therefore masks important internal inequalities in pension reach.

What this adds up to

Andhra Pradesh's substantial financial commitment to social-security pensions deserves recognition. The Sixteenth Finance Commission found that Andhra Pradesh had the highest budgeted per-capita expenditure on social-security pensions among the states in 2025–26, at ₹5,061 per person. The 2026–27 state budget has also allocated ₹27,719 crore to the NTR Bharosa pension scheme. This represents a significant and important welfare commitment.

Yet high aggregate spending has coexisted with a shrinking beneficiary base. Over the two-year period examined here, Andhra Pradesh's pension rolls fell by nearly 3 lakh, while applications under the regular categories remained closed and no fresh pensions were sanctioned. The announced inclusion of about 1.53 lakh eligible widows had also not materialised by July 2026. Taken together, these trends raise a serious question about whether expenditure is being contained by keeping regular enrolment closed and allowing the beneficiary base to contract. The available data do not establish the government's intention, but the government should explain why pension rolls have fallen while large numbers of eligible people remain outside the system.

This statewide contraction exists alongside substantial territorial inequalities in pension reach. ASR, the state's most heavily Adivasi district, remains near the bottom of the district-unit distribution. Mandal-level comparisons in both ASR and Parvathipuram Manyam also reveal gaps in remote, high-Adivasi and Scheduled Area mandals. Andhra Pradesh's high spending on pensions has therefore coexisted with a shrinking beneficiary base, a closed route to regular enrolment and geographically unequal pension reach.

With regular enrolment closed and no transparent process for challenging cancellations, existing gaps become increasingly difficult to correct. The processes through which pensions are sanctioned, verified and delivered can impose heavier burdens on people living in remote areas, where connectivity, access to offices and assistance with paperwork are limited. Closing these gaps requires deliberate, affirmative action, not passive administration.

- ● **Reopen regular enrolment:** Applications under all regular pension categories should be reopened immediately, with a time-bound process for identifying and sanctioning eligible entitlement holders.
- **Coverage benchmarks for Scheduled Areas:** The government should establish and publicly monitor mandal-level coverage benchmarks, taking account of the number of eligible households and the earlier eligibility age for ST residents. Scheduled Area mandals should not be permitted to persistently lag behind comparable non-scheduled mandals.
- **Proactive, door-to-door enrolment:** Village-level staff should be mandated to identify and enrol eligible people in remote habitations, rather than requiring them to navigate the process on their own.
- **A real grievance and appeal mechanism:** No pension should be cancelled without prior notice and a meaningful opportunity for the beneficiary to respond. Every cancellation must be challengeable locally, without forcing the beneficiary to travel, and the grounds for cancellation and the final decision must be communicated in writing with reasons. Where a cancellation is found to be wrongful, the pension and any pending arrears should be restored within a fixed time frame.
- **Public, granular, monthly data:** Mandal-level pension data, disaggregated by category and ST status, should be open for anyone to conduct audits.

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Data sources

Andhra Pradesh Social Security Pensions Portal: district-level pensions sanctioned for July 2024 and July 2026; mandal-level pension data for ASR, June 2025, and Parvathipuram Manyam, January 2026. Andhra Pradesh AEPDS portal: district- and mandal-level ration-card counts corresponding to the periods used in the analysis. Scheduled Tribe population shares are based on the 2011 Census. Scheduled Area classifications are based on the relevant government notifications.