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Government Strengthens SMILE Framework for Rehabilitating Persons Engaged in Begging

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SOCIAL ISSUES**POLITY****GS2**

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Government Strengthens SMILE Framework for Rehabilitating Persons Engaged in Begging

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has strengthened the rehabilitation framework under its **SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise)** scheme's Beggary sub-component, expanding shelter, skilling and family-reunification support for persons engaged in begging.*

WHAT THE SCHEME COVERS

The **SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise)** scheme, launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on **February 12, 2022**, funds two distinct sub-components under one umbrella: a **transgender welfare sub-scheme**, whose shelter network is branded **Garima Greh** (21 homes operational across 17 states), and a separate **Beggary sub-scheme**, which funds identification, shelter-based rehabilitation, skilling, education, healthcare access and family-reunification support for persons engaged in begging through dedicated rehabilitation centres in identified cities, distinct from the Garima Greh network. As of the latest government figures, nearly **10,000 persons** have been rehabilitated under the Beggary sub-scheme. The scheme targets rehabilitating **35,000 persons** and expanding geographic coverage from the current 216 cities to **295 cities by FY 2030-31**.

FROM CRIMINALISATION TO RIGHTS-BASED REHABILITATION

For decades, begging in India was treated primarily as an offence under state-level anti-begging laws modelled on the **Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959**, which several states adopted or adapted, empowering police to detain persons found begging and commit them to certified institutions. This criminalisation framework has been increasingly challenged in Indian courts: various High Courts have struck down or read down provisions criminalising begging, holding that begging is often a symptom of poverty, destitution or disability rather than a voluntary offence, and that criminalising it violates the dignity guaranteed under

Article 21 of the Constitution. SMILE-Beggary represents the Union government's welfare-scheme response to this shift, treating persons engaged in begging as a population requiring social support and reintegration rather than punishment.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY ANCHOR

The scheme's rehabilitative approach aligns with **Article 41** of the Directive Principles of State Policy, which directs the state to make effective provision for public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and undeserved want, within the limits of its economic capacity. It also converges with **Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty)**, positioning the scheme within India's broader social-protection architecture alongside programmes for the homeless, elderly and persons with disabilities.

IMPLEMENTATION GAPS TO WATCH

While shelter and skilling infrastructure has expanded, sustained rehabilitation of a historically marginalised and often transient population, one lacking documentation, stable addresses or family contact in many cases, remains a persistent administrative challenge. Family-reunification efforts depend on tracing origins that may span state lines, and skilling outcomes are only meaningful if paired with genuine livelihood or employment access after a person exits a rehabilitation centre, an outcome metric that receives less public reporting than shelter-capacity or identification figures.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; the shift from criminalisation to rights-based rehabilitation in social policy; Article 21 (right to life and dignity) and Article 41 (DPSP, right to public assistance); Centre-state coordination in implementing centrally sponsored welfare schemes.

Mains angle: "Begging has historically been treated as a criminal offence in India, though this framing is increasingly being displaced by rights-based rehabilitation. Discuss with reference to the SMILE-Beggary sub-scheme and constitutional principles of dignity." (250 words)

★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

SMILE-BEGGARY SUB-SCHEME:

SMILE umbrella scheme launched: February 12, 2022; nodal ministry: Social Justice and Empowerment

Rehabilitation via dedicated centres in identified cities, distinct from Garima Grehs (the transgender sub-scheme's 21 shelter homes across 17 states)

Nearly 10,000 persons rehabilitated so far under the Beggary sub-scheme

Target: 35,000 persons rehabilitated; coverage expanding from 216 to 295 cities by FY 2030-31

CONSTITUTIONAL ANCHORS:

Article 21 (dignity, right to life); Article 41 (DPSP, public assistance)

Aligned with SDG 1 (No Poverty)

Sources: PIB, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Source: Government Strengthens SMILE Framework for Rehabilitating Persons Engaged in Begging — Ujiyari.com
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