



No. R-17/17/2024-PRPP

**National Human Rights Commission**

**Minutes of the Open House Discussion on ‘Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity’**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India organised an open house discussion on ‘Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity’ on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2026, at Manavadhikar Bhavan, New Delhi. The meeting was chaired by Dr Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Hon’ble Member and attended by Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon’ble Member; Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra, Director General (Investigation); Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law); Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary; Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak, Joint Secretary; representative of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), UIDAI, NISD, Delhi Police, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Government of Rajasthan, Government of Kerala, Government of NCT of Delhi, member of academia and civil society.

**2. Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak**, Joint Secretary, welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda, which focused on the ‘Advisory for Protection and Rehabilitation of Impoverished, Uneducated Children, Women and Differently-abled Individuals Engaged in Begging’ issued by the National Human Rights Commission in June 2024. She mentioned that the advisory covers themes including survey, identification, education, healthcare, access to financial services and rehabilitation. She further stated that many States and UTs have sent Action Taken Reports to NHRC indicating the progress made in each State and UT. She outlined the key themes of the Open House Discussion as: i.) Addressing the Scope and Challenges of Beggary; ii.) Data, Documentation and Ground Realities; iii.) Rehabilitation, Employment and Long-term Solutions.



Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak delivering the welcome address

3. **Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi**, Hon'ble Member, NHRC, while chairing the meeting, observed that begging continues to remain a serious social concern in the country. He remarked that the persistence of begging, even in a nation counted among the world's largest economies, reflects deeper structural and social challenges requiring urgent and sustained attention and described begging not merely as an economic issue but as a social malady affecting the dignity and constitutional rights of vulnerable sections of society. The Hon'ble Member emphasised that the constitutional guarantee of equality before law under Article 14 must be meaningfully realised for all citizens, including people engaged in begging and underscored that every individual is entitled to live a safe, secure and dignified life. It was noted that several States have enacted legislation addressing begging, the discussion highlighted that the mere existence of legal provisions is insufficient and that greater attention is required to assess the actual outcomes of such legislation, particularly with respect to rehabilitation, reintegration and measurable improvements on the ground.

4. Reference was made to the NHRC Advisory (2024) on protection and rehabilitation of impoverished, uneducated children, women and differently abled persons engaged in begging and the SMILE Scheme (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) of the Government of India. The Hon'ble Member stressed the need to review the implementation status of the advisory and examine whether its intended objectives have translated into meaningful outcomes, with emphasis on identifying gaps in execution. He concluded by reiterating that addressing begging must be approached with a forward-looking perspective and that reducing and eventually eliminating begging requires a rights-based, rehabilitation-oriented strategy grounded in constitutional values of equality, dignity and social protection.



Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi delivering Inaugural Address

5. **Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani**, Hon'ble Member. NHRC emphasised the urgent need for a coordinated national strategy with clearly defined responsibilities, fixed timelines and strong accountability mechanisms, particularly in areas concerning women, children and labour. She stressed that effective policymaking must be grounded in reliable data called for the creation of a national portal supported by a comprehensive nationwide survey, stating that without accurate data,

sound policy decisions cannot be made. She further urged strict action against organised mafia networks involved in beggar trafficking, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement with better inter-agency coordination. She underscored that long-term rehabilitation must be prioritised over short-term relief with sustained focus on education, skill development and employment opportunities and social reintegration to ensure dignity and prevent relapse.

**6. Shri Bharat Lal**, Secretary General, underscored the principle of “leaving no one behind,” reflecting a ‘whole-of-government approach’ to ensuring that every individual and family receives basic public services. He stated that despite measures taken by UIDAI, certain vulnerable groups, including people engaged in beggary, are unable to get an Aadhar card. The most crucial document/proof they have to provide is about residence, which they don't have. At many places, good people/NGOs are providing them support and their support should be sought in ascertaining their residential proof. Most importantly, government officials on the ground need to be galvanised to organise camps on such hot spots to issue Aadhar card followed by providing them basic facilities/amenities, including the benefit of various government welfare schemes.

He emphasised that individuals engaged in beggary are unlikely to apply for Aadhaar on their own and therefore it should be the responsibility of public servants to facilitate the whole process. He noted that the first step is to identify hotspots where people engaged in beggary are concentrated and then ensure that they get their identity cards, which will enable them to access existing welfare schemes and policies. He emphasised that the issue should be addressed and eliminated in campaign mode and the Commission will follow up the process.



Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, delivering his remarks

7. **Smt. Yogita Swaroop**, Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, presented data from the 2011 Census on persons engaged in begging and outlined key government interventions, notably the SMILE Scheme for rehabilitation, education, reintegration and skill development. She detailed its multi-stage approach, including identification, outreach, comprehensive care and sustainable livelihood support. She also highlighted compliance with the Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions in cases related to beggary, including identification drives, shelter homes and coordinated efforts with States. She reiterated that the Government's objective is to achieve a "Begging Free India" through a humane, rights-based framework ensuring dignity and self-reliance.



Smt. Yogita Swaroop delivering her remarks on the implementation of the SMILE-B Scheme

**8. Shri Ajay Chaudhary**, Special Commissioner, Vigilance, Delhi Police, emphasised the need to redefine the concept of charity, noting that repeatedly giving alms to people on the streets often perpetuates the cycle of begging rather than resolving it. Addressing the serious concern of missing persons, he suggested systematic identification of beggars through the collection of photographs. This would help determine whether individuals have been forced into begging, have migrated, lack livelihood opportunities, or are reported missing, thereby facilitating efforts to reconnect them with their families. He also stressed the importance of identifying child beggars, vulnerable adults and any organised rackets operating behind them. Background verification and coordinated intervention would enable authorities to rehabilitate such individuals and restore family connections where possible. He further noted the need for a dedicated strategy for transgender persons engaged in begging, recognising their unique social and economic challenges. Additionally, he pointed out that begging at crossroads and traffic signals often leads to traffic congestion and accidents, posing risks to both pedestrians and motorists.

**9.** **Shri Shailendra Singh**, Dy. DG, Unique Identification Authority of India, apprised the participants about the initiatives undertaken by the UIDAI to ensure that destitute persons of all age groups, particularly children and persons with disabilities, are provided with a unique identification number (Adhaar) to enable them to access benefits under various government welfare schemes. He informed that UIDAI, in consultation with the Ministry of Women and Child Development in June 2025 and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in November 2025, has issued two separate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to facilitate the enrollment of destitute persons lacking standard identity documents.



Shri Shailendra Singh, Dy. DG delivering his remarks on the status of Aadhar use by destitutes

**10.** He elaborated on the role of the Child Protection Officer and the District Social Welfare Officer in issuing certification, in accordance with these SOPs, which enable UIDAI to either generate a new unique identification number (Adhaar) or undertake de-duplication of existing records, thereby also assisting, wherever possible, in family reunification. Shri Singh concluded by informing that UIDAI conducts enrollment camps in shelter homes to ensure on-site identification and accessibility and emphasised the need for wider dissemination and

popularisation of the SOPs to ensure comprehensive identification of destitute individuals, especially children and persons with disabilities.

**11. Shri Snehil Raj**, District Collector, Kozhikode, Government of Kerala, presented the successful UDYAM model which was launched on 24 March 2020 during the nationwide lockdown to safeguard homeless persons living on the streets with support from reputed NGOs. Vulnerable individuals were identified and accommodated in destitute camps across the district. He described UDYAM as a district administration-led model aimed at long-term transformation and rehabilitation rather than temporary shelter. Key issues identified included lack of medical care, family abandonment, mental health challenges, unemployment and absence of livelihood opportunities. By June 2020, the destitute camps evolved into the UDYAM project focusing on holistic rehabilitation of street dwellers, homeless persons and individuals engaged in beggary through coordinated efforts of government departments, NGOs, police and civil society. He also highlighted challenges arising from the influx of persons from other states lacking local residence and concluded that sustained multi-stakeholder efforts have brought the district close to achieving a beggar-free environment.

**12. Shri Rahul More**, Joint Commissioner, Women and Child Development Commissionerate, Maharashtra, stated that over the past two years, a comprehensive survey identified 600 individuals engaged in begging. Rehabilitation efforts have focused on providing employment opportunities in agricultural land-based jobs, both skilled and unskilled. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also been actively involved in supporting rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. In addition, in December 2025, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly passed a bill to amend the Maharashtra Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 (originally enacted as the *Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959*) by removing derogatory terms such as “leprosy patient” and “leper,” reflecting a commitment to ensuring dignity, non-discrimination, and respectful language in the legal framework.

**13. Smt. Reena Sharma**, Additional Director, Social Welfare, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Rajasthan, noted that despite the existence of policies to rehabilitate persons engaged in beggary, effective implementation is hindered by their frequent mobility and lack of stable identification, thereby making sustained intervention difficult. She

further pointed out that the segregation and disintegration of family members into separate shelter homes based on age and gender often acts as a setback to comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. She underscored the importance of enhanced coordination with MoSJE and UIDAI to streamline identification processes, strengthen rehabilitation measures and work collectively towards the eradication of beggary in the State of Rajasthan.

**14. Smt. Sunita Yadav**, Dy. Director, Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, informed that out of 13 districts in the State identified under the SMILE Schemes, NGO partners have been selected in 8 districts, while selection is underway in the remaining 5 districts. She emphasised the need for proactive outreach as beneficiaries do not come forward on their own and highlighted issues related to identity cards for people engaged in beggary.

**15. Dr R. Giri Raj**, Dy. Director (T & B) emphasised the need for proper training of District Collectors, particularly in relation to the systematic issuance of identity cards, to streamline support services and ensure eligible beneficiaries are covered efficiently. He informed that a dedicated helpline number has been established to enable immediate response and timely intervention in cases requiring urgent assistance. Finally, he focused on the importance of integrating the services provided by various NGOs to create a more comprehensive and coordinated support system, ensuring holistic and inclusive service delivery.

**16. Shri Zakir Hussain**, Superintendent, Social Defence, Dept. of Social Welfare, GNCTD detailed Delhi's SMILE implementation, funding 8 voluntary organisations serving 3,380 individuals. He urged stronger penal provisions in cases of organised begging, enabling Delhi Police to arrest. Engaging religious heads for mass awareness and tapping ideas from stakeholders on tourist areas and traffic signals were highlighted to advance a beggar-free India.

**17. Shri Fauzan Alavi**, Advocate and Former Special Rapporteur, NHRC, identified South Delhi as a major hot spot with high beggar numbers. He estimated 98% organized begging versus 2% genuine need, urging law-and-order measures with police intervention for enforcement.

**18. Prof. Vijay Raghavan**, TISS Mumbai, observed that most persons picked up during night rounds in South Mumbai are homeless individuals rather than actual beggars and are often released by courts based on probation officer reports. He highlighted key challenges, including the presence

of persons with disabilities, mental illness, elderly and abandoned women in beggars' homes, along with limited vocational training opportunities and inadequate NGO support.

**19.** He recommended that NHRC initiate dialogue with States on decriminalisation of beggary with reference to the Delhi High Court (Harsh Mander case) and J&K High Court judgments. He further suggested constituting a consultative group under the Ministry of Social Justice with NHRC participation to oversee implementation of the SMILE Scheme with a stronger rehabilitation focus rather than routine grant-based support. He proposed promotion of the Bihar model based on voluntary shelter admissions, skill training and corporate livelihood linkages without penal provisions and urged NHRC to support expediting Maharashtra's draft law centred on decriminalisation and rehabilitation. He also cautioned against introducing new penal provisions, including penalising almsgiving, noting that beggary largely arises from destitution and lack of alternatives, while instances of organised or professional begging remain rare exceptions.

**20.** **Shri Chandra Mishra**, Director, Beggars Corporation, highlighted that in Indore, Nharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) provisions are used to penalise beggars, even as the SMILE scheme provides for rehabilitation, effectively overriding state-level penalties. In Indore, beggars have reported being coerced by gangs, yet no follow-up action was taken, which reflects poorly on society and international perceptions. On SMILE funding, he noted an initial 100 crore allocation, with 265 of 365 groups for transgenders, but only 16.27 crores used from 2020-2025, about 60% remains unspent.

**21.** He proposed that NHRC may consider constituting a model committee on the SMILE Scheme comprising representatives from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, State and UT Social Welfare Departments and NGOs. He suggested that the committee may examine the decriminalisation of beggary in a coordinated manner and explore the issuance of identity cards to people engaged in beggary to facilitate identification and access to welfare measures. He further recommended introducing structured training programmes for social integration and expanding the definition of beggary to ensure clarity and uniform understanding. Additionally, he emphasised the need for comprehensive nationwide surveys to identify root causes and source locations of begging, strengthening rehabilitation measures beyond financial assistance and linking skill development initiatives with market opportunities to ensure sustainable

livelihoods. He also highlighted that children are often pushed into begging by families and therefore rehabilitation efforts should extend to entire families rather than individuals alone.



Shri Chandra Mishra delivering his remarks on supporting families involved in begging

22. **Mohd Tarique**, Founder, Koshish Trust, highlighted that in Mumbai, arrests of beggars are often carried out in the name of rescue operations. He shared that his organisation is facilitating school enrolment of children in Delhi and Mumbai, but 200 children remain excluded due to lack of Aadhaar. He said that sports activities are being used to engage them after school hours and prevent relapse into begging. He observed that a key gap in the SMILE Scheme is in its approach at State/ UT level, where it is often treated as a law enforcement exercise leading to forced evictions and shelter runaways. He recommended mapping the eligibility criteria of social welfare schemes in a consolidated format and conducting orientation and capacity-building programmes for State officials. He further suggested that NHRC may consider long-term engagement through a small working group with the Ministry to monitor ground-level progress alongside initiatives in Delhi and Mumbai.

**23. Shri Naveen Kumar**, Director, Atchayam Trust, Tamil Nadu, highlighted his organisation's overarching vision is to work towards a beggar-free India. In the last two years, Atchayam Trust has mobilised more than 800 volunteers to participate in rescue operations and rehabilitation initiatives. The Trust provides comprehensive support, including shelter home rehabilitation, vocational training and livelihood generation. Government initiatives such as the SMILE Scheme have been integrated into their efforts to strengthen outcomes. However, challenges remain, including cases involving communicable diseases and severe mental health issues. Elderly persons engaged in beggary often require sustained, long-term care in rehabilitative homes. Shri Naveen Kumar emphasised the importance of strong aftercare mechanisms to address gaps that lead individuals to return to begging, advocating for continued training, follow-up support and structured reintegration into society.

**24. Shri Ram Kishore Ji**, Founder, Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad, Patna, emphasised that budget allocations and actual expenditures for rehabilitation initiatives must be closely monitored to ensure transparency and accountability, particularly by NHRC, so that funds are properly utilised for the intended beneficiaries. He notes that a large proportion of individuals engaged in begging are compelled by circumstances and nearly 80% of them are willing to leave begging if provided with viable livelihood opportunities. According to him, shelter homes should primarily be reserved for those who cannot be rehabilitated through regular means, such as persons with severe mental health issues or disabilities. For others, focused skill development programs should be introduced based on their talents, such as singing and other abilities, to help them earn a dignified livelihood. He further suggests that individuals residing near religious places can be supported in small-scale economic activities, such as selling pooja items, enabling them to sustain themselves independently.



Shri Ram Kishore, emphasising the role of NHRC in preventing Beggary

**25. Shri Sharad Patel**, Founder, Badlaav, Uttar Pradesh, delivered a video presentation highlighting their outreach strategy, wherein team members dressed like persons engaged in begging to better understand their challenges, build trust and connect with them empathetically. This approach enabled effective rescue, counselling and rehabilitation efforts. He highlighted that many people affected by leprosy are abandoned by their families due to stigma and discrimination, leaving them with no option but to resort to begging. Badlaav provides shelter homes, medical treatment, mental health counselling and comprehensive rehabilitation support. The organisation also promotes livelihood opportunities through micro-enterprises such as tailoring, auto-rickshaw driving and vegetable vending, aiming to ensure stable employment for at least six months with a monthly income of ₹10,000 to ₹15,000. Once beneficiaries attain financial stability and social confidence, efforts are made to reintegrate them with their families and society while preserving their dignity and reducing stigma.



Shri Sharad Patel mentioning his organisation's work with people engaged in begging

**26. Smt. Anupama Nilekar**, Director General (Investigation) emphasised the need to develop a working model on beggary, focusing on whether individuals are destitute or engaged in organised begging. She suggested that decriminalisation of beggary may be examined in alignment with the Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), Anti-Human Trafficking Act and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) framework. She further highlighted the need to define the role of probation officers in preventing relapse and to establish a monitoring mechanism through probation offices. Sensitisation and capacity-building programmes were recommended in the 15 most affected districts. She also emphasised the inclusion of socio-economic crimes in police training programmes to enable a better understanding of beggary, noting that currently only Anti-Human Trafficking and NDPS modules are included in the training schedule

**27.** In his closing remarks, Shri Bharat Lal further observed that while the government often operates through sectoral programmes, there is a need to adopt a bottom-up approach, while keeping the larger objective of social inclusion in focus. In his closing remarks, Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, quoting the spirit of the saying “Where there is a will, there is a way,” remarked

that the dedication and commitment demonstrated by the participants reflected a shared resolve to bring meaningful change. He observed that policy formulation, administrative implementation and grassroots-level execution are distinct processes and that gaps in coordination may naturally arise among these levels. However, he emphasised that such challenges can be addressed through commitment and collective will.

The following suggestions were given by speakers in the Open House discussion on beggary:

- i.)** Conduct nationwide surveys to identify the root causes, source locations, and demographic profiles of persons engaged in begging;
- ii.)** Identify begging hotspots and carry out targeted interventions in those locations;
- iii.)** Organise Aadhaar enrolment camps in shelter homes and hotspot areas through coordinated outreach;
- iv.)** Establish a national portal integrating data on persons engaged in begging, rehabilitation status, and services accessed;
- v.)** Modify the definition of beggary for uniform understanding across States/UTs and initiate structured dialogue with States on decriminalisation of beggary, aligned with relevant judgments of Courts;
- vi.)** Create a consolidated matrix mapping eligibility criteria of all social welfare schemes to clarify inclusion/ exemptions for beneficiaries;
- vii.)** Issue identity cards to persons engaged in begging to enable access to welfare schemes and tracking of rehabilitation progress;
- viii.)** Form an NHRC–Ministry working group for long-term monitoring of ground-level implementation to periodically review the SMILE Scheme implementation;
- ix.)** Link skill development programmes directly with market opportunities and corporate partnerships.
- x.)** MOSJE to ensure voluntary shelter admission models rather than coercive institutionalisation.
- xi.)** Avoid unnecessary separation of children from their families during rescue and rehabilitation processes in shelter homes;
- xii.)** Extend rehabilitation support to entire families, especially where children are pushed into begging;
- xiii.)** Organise orientation and capacity-building programmes for State/ UT officers on their perspective-building;

- xiv.) Include beggary and socio-economic vulnerability modules in police training curricula;
- xv.) Fast-track Aadhaar processing for children ready for school enrollment;
- xvi.) Use sports and structured after-school engagement programmes to prevent children from returning to begging;
- xvii.) Strengthen systems for family tracing and reunification through systematic identification; and
- xviii.) Implement strict action against organised begging mafias and trafficking networks under relevant BNS sections.

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### **List of Participants**

#### **From the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**

1. Dr Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Hon'ble Member
2. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Member
3. Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General,
4. Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law),
5. Smt. Anupama Chandra Nilekar, DG (Investigation)
6. Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary
7. Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak, Joint Secretary
8. Ms Varsha Apte, Consultant (Research)
9. Ms Radhika Goel, Research Assistant
10. Shri Rishi Kumar, Research Assistant
11. Shri Raghwendra Singh, Junior Research Consultant
12. Ms Avani Verma, Junior Research Consultant
13. Ms Shelly Anand, Junior Research Consultant
14. Ms Stuti Joshi, Junior Research Consultant
15. Ms Vaidehi Rastogi, Junior Research Consultant

#### **Invited Domain experts**

1. Smt. Yogita Swaroop, Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India
2. Shri Ajay Chaudhary, Special CP (Vigilance), Delhi Police
3. Shri Shailendra Singh, Dy. Director General, Unique Identification Authority of India

4. Col. Nikhil Sinha, Director, Unique Identification Authority of India
5. Shri Snehil Singh, District Collector, Kozhikode, Govt. of Kerala
6. Shri Rahul More, Deputy Commissioner, Women & Child Commissionerate, Govt. of Maharashtra
7. Smt. Reena Sharma, Additional Director (Social Welfare), Social Justice & Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan
8. Smt. Sunita Yadav, Dy. Director, Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
9. Dr. R. Giri Raj Dy. Director (T&B), National Institute of Social Defence
10. Shri Zakir Hussain, Superintendent, Social Defence, Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of NCT of Delhi
11. Shri Fauzan Alvi, Advocate and Former SR, NHRC
12. Prof. Vijay Raghavan, Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai
13. Shri Chandra Mishra, Director, Beggars Corporation
14. Mohd. Tarique, Founder, Koshish Trust
15. Shri Ram Kishore, Founder, Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad, Patna
16. Shri Naveen Kumar, Director, Atchayam Trust, Tamil Nadu
17. Shri Sharad Patel, Founder, Badlaav, Uttar Pradesh
18. Ms. Shweta Sehgal, Consultant, National Institute of Social Defence

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