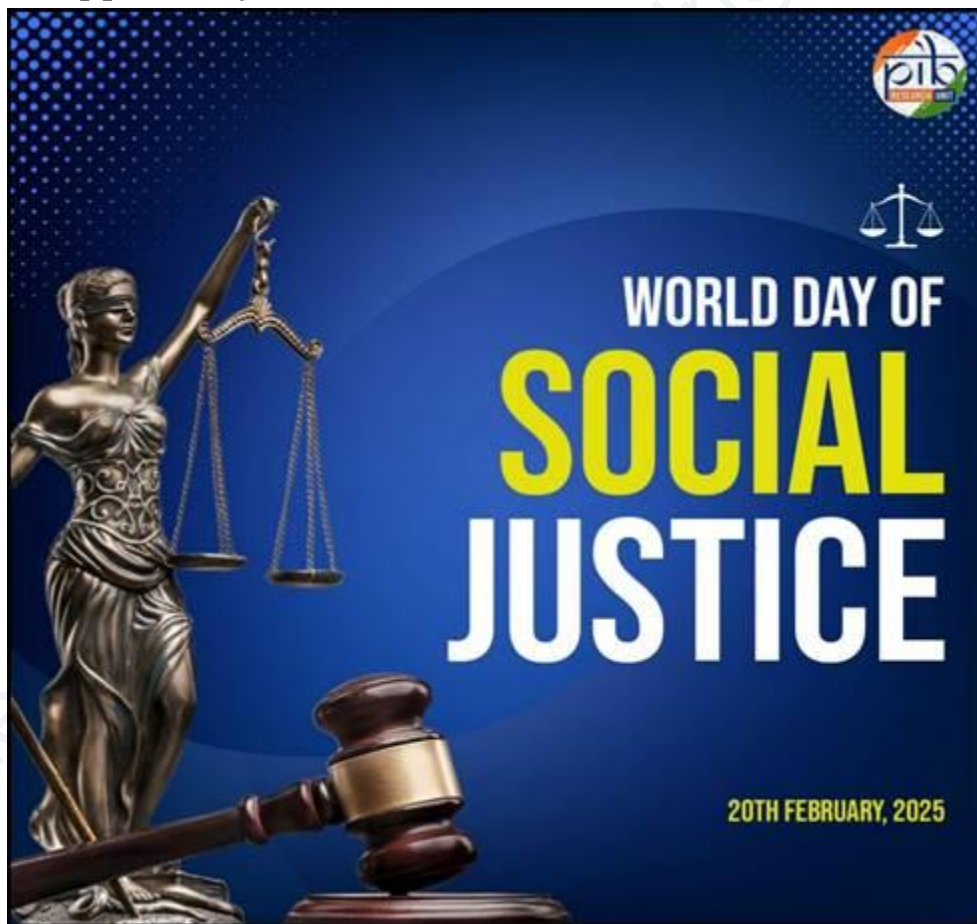


## World Day of Social Justice – 20th February

India's Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

### Introduction

**World Day of Social Justice**, observed annually on **February 20<sup>th</sup>** by the **United Nations**, serves as a global call to action for addressing poverty, exclusion, and unemployment while promoting solidarity, harmony, and equality of opportunity within and between societies.



Aligned with the ethos of the World Day of Social Justice, India's **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)** has intensified efforts to bridge socio-economic gaps through legislative reforms, grassroots empowerment, and global partnerships.

### **Background & Global Context**

Established by the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** during the 62<sup>nd</sup> session on November 26, 2007, the **World Day of Social Justice** has been celebrated annually on 20<sup>th</sup> Feb since the 63<sup>rd</sup> session in 2009. This observance stems from the recognition that **social development and social justice** are indispensable for achieving and maintaining peace and security both within and among nations. The day emphasizes that **social justice** cannot be attained without **peace, security, and respect** for all **human rights and fundamental freedoms**.

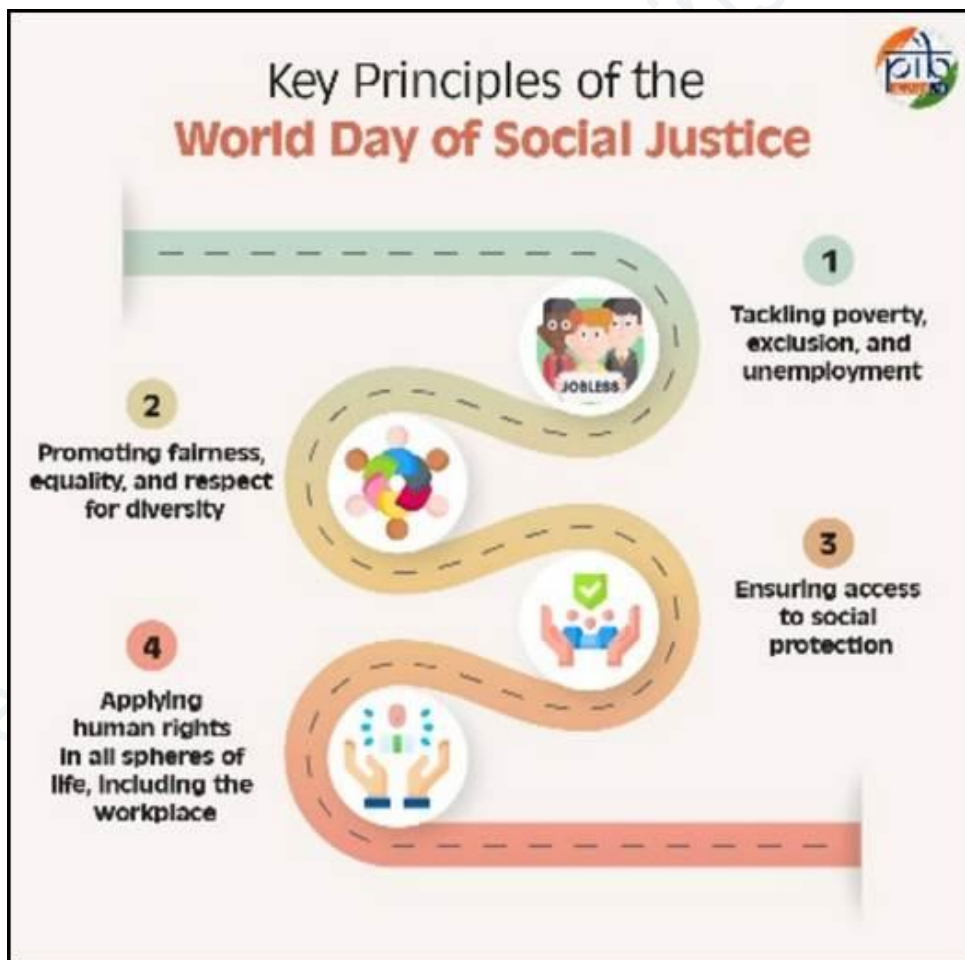
In the face of global challenges such as financial crises, insecurity, and inequality, the day serves as a reminder of the ongoing need for social justice initiatives. It emphasizes the importance of **creating opportunities through trade, investment, technological advancements, and economic growth** while addressing the obstacles that hinder full participation in the global economy, particularly for developing countries and those in transition.

**The International Labour Organization (ILO)** also plays a crucial role in promoting social justice through its **Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization**, adopted in 2008. This declaration builds upon previous ILO

statements and places the **Decent Work Agenda** at the core of the organization's policies.

The day aligns closely with the United Nations' broader mission to **promote development and human dignity**. Initiatives like the **Social Protection Floor**, launched in 2009, demonstrate the UN's commitment to ensuring basic social guarantees for all.

The World Day of Social Justice highlights several key principles and objectives:



## Evolution of Social Justice in India

India has observed the World Day of Social Justice since **2009**. The evolution of social justice and empowerment in India has been a gradual but progressive process influenced by historical struggles, constitutional mandates, and policy developments. The vision of social justice and empowerment has been deeply rooted in India's independence movement and the vision laid down by the Constitution to ensure equality, dignity, and justice for all citizens, especially the marginalized communities.

The **Constitution of India** lays a strong foundation for social justice and empowerment through various provisions that aim to eliminate social inequalities and promote the welfare of disadvantaged groups.

## Key Constitutional Provisions on Social Justice and Empowerment

### Preamble

The **Preamble** ensures **social, economic, and political justice**, guarantees **equality of status and opportunity**, and promotes **fraternity** to uphold individual dignity and national unity. It establishes the foundation for a **just and inclusive society** free from discrimination.

### Fundamental Rights (Part III)

**Article 23** prohibits **human trafficking and forced labour**, making such practices punishable by law. **Article 24** bans **child labour in hazardous occupations**, protecting children's rights to safety and education. These rights safeguard vulnerable groups from exploitation.

Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)

**Article 37** states that DPSPs, though not legally enforceable, are essential for governance. **Article 38** directs the State to **reduce social and economic inequalities**. **Article 39** ensures **equal livelihood, fair wages, and protection from exploitation**. **Article 39A** guarantees **free legal aid for the disadvantaged**. **Article 46** mandates **special educational and economic promotion for SCs, STs, and weaker sections** to prevent discrimination.

In 1985-86, the **Ministry of Welfare** was bifurcated into the Department of Women & Child Development and the Department of Welfare, incorporating divisions from the Ministries of Home Affairs and Law. It was later renamed the **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment** in **May 1998**.

The **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment** envisions building an inclusive society where marginalized groups can lead productive, safe, and dignified lives with adequate support for their growth and development. It strives to empower these groups through **educational, economic, and social development programs, along with rehabilitation initiatives** where necessary.

**The Union Budget 2025-26 reflects this commitment, allocating Rs 13,611 crores to the MoSJE, a 6 percent increase from 2024-25, to ensure saturation coverage of welfare schemes.**

The department's mandate focuses on uplifting socially, educationally, and economically marginalized communities, including **Scheduled Castes**,

Other Backward Classes, Senior Citizens, Victims of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Transgender Persons (under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019), individuals engaged in begging, Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs), Economically Backward Classes (EBCs), and the Economically Weaker Section (EWS). Through targeted policies and interventions, it aims to foster equity and inclusion in society.

## Key Initiatives by the Government of India

### 1. Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojana (PM-AJAY)



The scheme launched in 2021-22, merges three schemes to uplift SC communities through skill development, income generation, and infrastructure in Schedule Caste dominated villages. It has three components: **Adarsh Gram development**, **Grants-in-Aid for socio-economic projects**, and **hostel construction** in higher education institutions. Since January 1, 2024, **5,051 villages** have been declared Adarsh Gram, **1,655 projects** benefiting **3,05,842 people** have been sanctioned, and **₹26.31 crore** allocated for **38 hostels**.

### 2. Scheme for Residential Education for Students in High Schools in Targeted Areas (SRESHTA)

The **SHRESHTA** scheme aims to bridge service gaps in Schedule Caste dominant areas by supporting **grant-in-aid institutions** and **high-quality residential schools**. It provides **financial assistance** to top **CBSE/State Board-affiliated private schools** for SC students in **classes 9 and 11**, ensuring education till **class 12**. Additionally, it funds **NGOs/VOs** to run **residential and non-residential schools** and **hostels** with adequate infrastructure and strong academic standards, fostering **socio-economic upliftment** of SC communities.

### 3. Purple Fests

**Purple Fests (Festival of Inclusion)** have been organized by the **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment**, since 2023. In 2024, the event welcomed over **10,000 Divyangjan and their escorts**, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual respect. Purple Fest is a movement towards a more equitable society, championing the values of accessibility, dignity, and equal opportunity for all. The event also saw the launch of significant initiatives, including the **India Neurodiversity Platform** in collaboration with **TATA POWER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST**, aimed at early intervention and home care support, a **handbook on attitudinal barriers and disability-sensitive language** to promote inclusive communication, and a nationwide series of **25 job fairs** by the American Indian Foundation and DEPwD.



Performances from the Purple Fest – 2024

#### 4. National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)

The National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) is a Central Sector Scheme launched in FY 2023-24 as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJ&E) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). It aims to ensure the safety, dignity, and sustainable livelihood of sanitation workers in urban India. The scheme has integrated components of the former Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers

(SRMS) and expanded its coverage to include **waste pickers** as a target group from FY 2024-25.



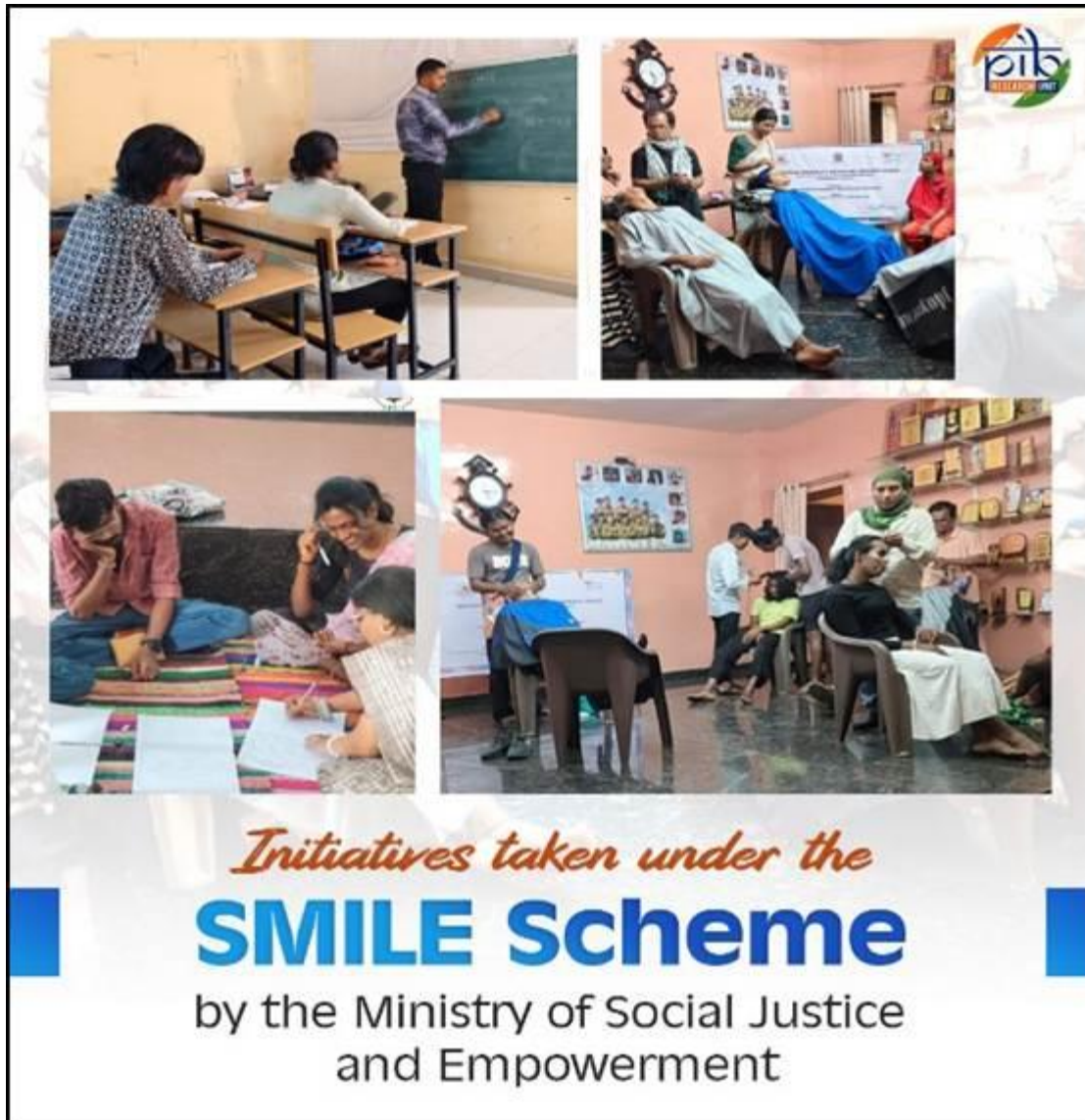
**Key Components of NAMASTE Scheme:**

- ▣ Profiling of SSWs in Urban Local Bodies through digital tools.
- ▣ Health Insurance of SSW under Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- ▣ Occupational safety training of SSWs and Sanitation Response Units for NAMASTE.
- ▣ Capital Subsidy up to Rs. 5.00 lakh for procurement of Sanitation Related Vehicles/ Equipment.
- ▣ Distribution of PPE to SSWs.
- ▣ Distribution of safety devices to Emergency Response Sanitation Unit (ERSU).
- ▣ Information, Education & Communication Campaign for awareness on SSW safety and dignity.

## 5. Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood & Enterprise (SMILE)

The **Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE) Scheme** is a comprehensive initiative aimed at the **rehabilitation of transgender individuals and persons engaged in begging**. Its primary objective is to create a '**Bhiksha Vritti Mukh Bharat**' (**Begging-free India**) by ensuring the reintegration of beggars into mainstream society. The scheme focuses on **area-specific surveys, awareness campaigns, mobilization and rescue operations, access to shelter homes and basic services, skills training, alternative livelihood options, and the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**. Currently, it is active in **81 cities and towns**, including

key pilgrimage, historical, and tourist locations, with plans to expand to 50 more cities in the next phase.



As of November 15, 2024, 7,660 individuals engaged in begging have been identified, out of which 970 have been successfully rehabilitated. The scheme continues to work towards its goal by providing shelter, vocational

**training, and employment opportunities**, helping marginalized individuals regain dignity and self-sufficiency.

## 6. PM-DAKSH Yojana

The PM-DAKSH Yojana launched on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2021, aims to **enhance the skill levels** of marginalized communities, including SCs, OBCs, EBCs, DNTs, and Safai Karamcharis, for **economic empowerment through free skill training**. The scheme, with a **budget of ₹450.25 crore (2021-26)**, provides short-term and long-term training to facilitate wage and self-employment, ensuring at least 70% placement. Training is conducted through Government and reputed Private Training Institutes, aligned with NSQF and Common Norms of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), targeting individuals aged **18-45 years**.

## 7. Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan



Launched on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020, the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA) aims to make **India drug-free** by targeting **272 high-risk districts**, identified through a **national survey and NCB inputs**. The campaign follows a **three-pronged approach: curbing supply** (Narcotics Control Bureau), **awareness and demand reduction** (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment), and **treatment** (Health Department). Since its inception,

NMBA has reached **13.57 crore people**, including **4.42 crore youth** and **2.71 crore women**, with participation from **3.85 lakh educational institutions**.

## Conclusion

As the world grapples with economic challenges, the **World Day of Social Justice** renews commitments to equity and inclusion, reminding us that injustice anywhere affects all of humanity. While progress has been made, much remains to be done. India has embraced this vision through legislative reforms, grassroots programs, and targeted welfare initiatives. The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)** plays a key role in uplifting marginalized communities, aligning its efforts with global frameworks like the **Decent Work Agenda** and **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** to uphold justice and equality.

Through initiatives like **PM-AJAY**, **NAMASTE**, **SMILE**, **PM-DAKSH Yojana**, and **Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan**, MoSJE has empowered disadvantaged groups with education, skills, and economic opportunities. Increased budget allocations, inclusive platforms like **Purple Fests**, and expanded social protection measures highlight the government's commitment to fostering justice and inclusion. As India observes the **World Day of Social Justice**, these efforts reaffirm its dedication to bridging socio-economic gaps and ensuring dignity and opportunity for all.

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