

GOVT. TO ENUMERATE PEOPLE WHO CLEAN SEWERS

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Ministry draws distinction between sewer cleaning and manual scavenging. Ravi Choudhary

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E) is now preparing to undertake a nationwide survey to enumerate all people engaged in hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks, an activity that has led to at least 351 deaths since 2017. Drawing a distinction between this work and manual scavenging, the Ministry insisted that the practice of manual scavenging no longer takes place in the country as all manual scavengers had been accounted for and enrolled into the rehabilitation scheme.

Ministry officials said that the enumeration exercise, soon to be conducted across 500 AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) cities, is part of the Union government's National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE), which will streamline the process of rehabilitating sanitation workers and eventually merge with and replace the Self-Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), which was started in 2007.

The NAMASTE scheme is being undertaken jointly by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the MoSJ&E and aims to eradicate unsafe sewer and septic tank cleaning practices, said Yogita Swaroop, Senior Economic Advisor in the MoSJ&E, who is overseeing the project. Officials said that the Ministry has already cleared Rs. 360 crore for this project — to be spent over the next four years.

Other benefits under the scheme will include capital subsidies of up to Rs. 5 lakh on sanitation machinery costing up to Rs. 15 lakh and interest subsidies on loans, where interest rates will be capped between 4-6% for the beneficiaries.

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