

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT  
RAJYA SABHA  
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO -2687  
ANSWERED ON - 18/12/2024

**SEWER AND SEPTIC TANK WORKERS UNDER THE NAMASTE SCHEME**

2687. SHRI MOHAMMED NADIMUL HAQUE

Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:-

- (a) whether Government has data on the socio-economic and caste composition of Sewer and Septic Tank Workers profiled under the NAMASTE scheme, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether Government has identified gaps between its claim of eradication of manual scavenging, and the recorded deaths from hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks and the steps taken to address these gaps; and
- (c) whether Government intends to expand the definition of manual scavenging to include hazardous cleaning practices for comprehensive protection and rehabilitation, if so, the timeline for such amendments?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT

(SHRI RAMDAS ATHAWALE)

(a) The current profiled Sewer and Septic Tank Workers (SSWs) in the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across India, are 57,758 and out of this, validated SSWs are 54,574.

Sewer and Septic Tank Cleaning work is an occupation based activity rather than caste based. Government has no economic data of SSWs.

The category wise composition of the validated Sewer and Septic Tanks Workers (SSWs) under "National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)" Scheme in the country are as under:-

| Caste/Category     | No. of SSWs   | %age  |
|--------------------|---------------|-------|
| General            | 4,391         | 8.05  |
| OBC                | 8,587         | 15.73 |
| SC                 | 37,060        | 67.91 |
| ST                 | 4,536         | 8.31  |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>54,574</b> |       |

(b) As per the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013), Manual Scavenging is different from hazardous cleaning of Sewer or Septic Tanks. As per MS Act, 2013, manual scavenging is banned activity, whereas hazardous cleaning of Sewer or Septic Tank is prohibited and regulated activity. Manual Cleaning of Sewer or Septic Tanks is permitted in exceptional circumstances with written order of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Urban Local Bodies by recording the reasons.

Department of Social Justice and Empowerment in convergence with Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs with an objective to ensure safety and dignity to Safai Karmacharis and to empower them socially and economically has formulated the “National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)” Scheme, which was launched in 2023-24 for its implementation in all 4800+ Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) of the country. The aim of the scheme is to achieve the following:-

- Zero fatalities in sanitation work in India
- All sanitation work to be performed by skilled workers
- No sanitation workers come in direct contact with human faecal matter
- Increased awareness amongst sanitation services seekers (individuals and institutions) to seek services from registered and skilled sanitation workers
- Strengthening and capacitating Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) to ensure safe delivery of mechanized sanitation services.
- Empowering of Sanitation workers to run sanitation enterprises and promote mechanization of cleaning operation through availability of machines.

The scheme formalizes SSWs by profiling them and ensure safe cleaning by providing capacity building occupational training and mechanized equipment and health insurance.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has issued the following advisory:-

- (i) Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for cleaning of Sewer or Septic tank.
- (ii) Advisory for technical and managerial interventions for ensuring safety during sewer and septic tank cleaning through Emergency Response Sanitation Unit (ERSU).
- (iii) Ready Reckoner for Urban Local Bodies for ensuring safety of sanitation workers.
- (iv) Organising Safaimitra Suraksha Shivirs nationwide through ULBs to provide health checkups and linkage to social welfare schemes.

(c) No, Sir.

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