

Press Release from District Administrative Centre-Gangtok

An outreach programme under the SMILE Scheme (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) was conducted in Gangtok Town on 05 February 2026 by the Gangtok District Administrative Centre, the implementing authority of the scheme, through the partnering NGO Stars of Hope, as per the directions of the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim. The outreach was undertaken as part of the sub-scheme Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in the Act of Begging.

The outreach aimed to identify individuals engaged in begging, assess their psychological, medical, and social conditions, and provide on-site counselling and awareness regarding the prohibition of begging in the State of Sikkim, along with available rehabilitation measures under the SMILE Scheme.

The SMILE Scheme, a programme of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, adopts a rights-based and humane approach towards the comprehensive rehabilitation of persons engaged in begging. The scheme focuses on identification, counselling, medical and psychological support, skill development, and linkage with social welfare and livelihood opportunities.

The outreach team comprised representatives of Stars of Hope, a counsellor from District Hospital Singtam, and police personnel.

During the outreach, six newly observed individuals engaged in begging were identified, and one previously surveyed case was reviewed. Counselling was provided on-site, and individuals were sensitised about rehabilitation options, social welfare linkages, and relevant legal provisions. The interactions revealed that several individuals were affected by multiple vulnerabilities, including substance dependence, mental health conditions, physical disabilities, age-related illnesses, and lack of family or caregiver support.

Earlier surveys conducted under the SMILE Scheme across Gangtok District have identified more than 30 individuals engaged in begging in various forms.

Members of the society are requested to support the objectives of the SMILE Scheme by reporting instances of begging in Gangtok District. Details, along with photographs and location, may be shared with Stars of Hope via WhatsApp at +91 89002 25195 for necessary follow-up and rehabilitation action.