

NHRC, India to organise a National Conference on Rights of Transgender Persons: Revamping Spaces, Reclaiming Voices in New Delhi on 4th September 2025

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The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India, is hosting a National Conference on the Rights of Transgender Persons on Thursday, 4th September 2025, at the Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Centered on the theme “Revamping Spaces, Reclaiming Voices,” the conference emphasises the immediate need to tackle systemic discrimination, uplift lived experiences, and promote meaningful inclusion for transgender persons in all areas of life. Justice Shri V. Ramasubramanian, Chairperson, NHRC, will be gracing the event as the Chief Guest. A wide spectrum of participants including government officials, judicial and legal experts, policymakers, civil society organisations, community leaders, academics, law enforcement agencies, and media representatives will convene for an in-depth, day-long dialogue focused on the challenges, opportunities, and policy priorities necessary to guarantee the rights of transgender persons in India.

The conference aims to create a national platform for dialogue on the rights and welfare of transgender persons, review the implementation of legal provisions and welfare schemes such as the Transgender Persons Act, 2019, and the SMILE scheme, and recommend practical policy reforms to strengthen institutional care, reduce stigma, and enhance access to education, healthcare, and employment. It also seeks to ensure greater accountability and sensitization within law enforcement agencies, while celebrating the voices and resilience of transgender persons and acknowledging their contribution to India’s social fabric.

As transgender persons have always been part of India’s social and cultural fabric, their journey reflecting a passage from invisibility to recognition, and now towards inclusion. Once respected and celebrated in epics, traditions, and community practices, their dignity and social standing gradually diminished over time, leaving the community struggling for acceptance and equality.

In the decades following independence, transgender persons in India continued to face neglect and marginalisation, despite explicit constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Yet, the determination of the community, supported by civil society and judicial interventions, began to reshape this narrative. The Supreme Court’s landmark judgment in *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) marked a turning point, affirming self-identification as a fundamental right and recognising transgender persons as the “third gender.” This recognition gained strength through the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which prohibits discrimination and lays down a framework for welfare and inclusion.

In 2023, the National Human Rights Commission carried this journey forward by issuing a comprehensive Advisory on the Welfare of Transgender Persons, urging governments to ensure equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and social protection. Each of these milestones reflects a steady march from marginalisation to dignity, from silence to voice, and from exclusion to belonging. The conference builds on this positive momentum, seeking to open new spaces of inclusion and ensure that every transgender person lives with respect, opportunity, and pride.

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment launched the Garima Greh initiative as a pilot programme with 12 shelters across 9 states/UTs to provide safe housing and comprehensive support to destitute adult transgender persons. Now integrated into the Central Sector Scheme SMILE, the initiative offers temporary rehabilitation for up to one year, including safe shelter, essential amenities, healthcare, counselling, skill

development, and livelihood opportunities, helping beneficiaries reintegrate into society with dignity and independence.

Despite its progressive goals, the initiative faces critical funding delays, operational challenges, and systemic gaps. The Garima Greh shelters encounter issues such as limited coverage, inadequate infrastructure, low awareness among target beneficiaries, and difficulties in effective social reintegration. Recognising the community's vulnerability and these challenges, the NHRC, India has undertaken visits to assess the ground realities in operating Garima Greh shelters to ensure the initiative meets its objectives comprehensively. This assessment is part of the Commission's broader commitment to uphold the rights and welfare of transgender persons through better implementation and monitoring of such rehabilitation programmes.

Building upon the findings from these visits, the Commission has prepared a comprehensive report aimed at strengthening policies and frameworks to uphold the rights and dignity of transgender individuals. By identifying gaps in existing guidelines and highlighting effective interventions, the research provides evidence-based recommendations for policy enhancement. In continuation of this effort, the Commission is organising a National Conference on the Rights of Transgender Persons to discuss and advance these crucial issues.

The National Conference is structured into four sessions and a valedictory, each focusing on key priorities. The first will review the ***strengthening of Garima Greh shelters*** under the SMILE scheme, with the NHRC presenting findings from its visits and facilitating discussions on improving infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihood support. The second will focus on ***institutional care for gender non-conforming children and elderly transgender persons***, highlighting the legal gaps in child protection laws and exploring ways to ensure inclusive care for those facing early rejection and for elderly transgender persons requiring permanent support. The third session will deliberate on ***building a fair and inclusive law enforcement framework***, addressing the harassment often faced by transgender persons, exploring the establishment of Transgender Protection Cells and grievance redressal mechanisms, and promoting greater representation of transgender persons within police and security forces. The final session, ***Unlocking Employment, Defying Challenges – Stories of Triumph***, will highlight pathways to dignified employment through skill development, entrepreneurship, and inclusive hiring, while also showcasing success stories of transgender persons who have overcome barriers with the support of government and community initiatives.

The diverse panel will comprise representatives from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the National Commission for Women, UN agency, academia, community members, law enforcement officials, NGOs, and other key stakeholders.

The NHRC, India firmly believes that the integration of transgender persons into society is not just a legal or institutional responsibility, but a moral imperative. By convening this conference, the Commission seeks to pave the way for transformative change, ensuring that every transgender person in India is able to live with dignity, access equal opportunities, and reclaim their rightful space in society. The deliberations and recommendations emerging from this conference will contribute towards strengthening inclusive policies and practices, advancing the rights of transgender persons, and reaffirming India's commitment to the principles of human rights, equality, and justice for all.

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