

# JANUARY 2026 ROUND-UP: The Equity Audit

**Theme:** From 'Welfare Entitlement' to 'Rights-Based Empowerment'

January 2026 saw a distinct shift in the Social Justice narrative. The focus moved from merely "distributing benefits" (saturation) to "enforcing rights" (legal mandates). The Supreme Court's intervention in disability rights and the new data on Gig Workers were the standout moments.

## 1. Tribal Justice: PM-JANMAN's 'Solar' Leap

- **Event:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs released the **PM-JANMAN Progress Report (Jan 2026)**.
- **Key Data:** The mission achieved a critical milestone: **Electrification of 1 Lakh PVTG Households** via off-grid solar solutions.
- **Mains Relevance:** This is a case study in "**Last Mile Justice.**" By using *Solar Mini-Grids* (₹50,000 subsidy per household) instead of waiting for grid extension in remote forests, the state is bridging the "Energy Poverty" gap for the most marginalized 75 tribes.

## 2. Disability Rights: The 'Sujata Bora' Judgment

- **Event:** Supreme Court Judgment in *Sujata Bora v. Coal India Ltd* (January 13, 2026).
- **Key Ruling:** The Court held that denying employment to a person with benchmark disability on "technical grounds" is illegal. It mandated the creation of "**Supernumerary Posts**" (extra posts created specifically to accommodate) if regular vacancies are filled.
- **Mains Relevance:** This reinforces the principle of "**Reasonable Accommodation.**" It shifts disability justice from *Charity* (giving pension) to *Empowerment* (guaranteeing jobs), asserting that the "State must adapt to the Person, not the Person to the State."

## 3. Labour Justice: The Gig Worker Milestone

- **Data Release:** Ministry of Labour & Employment (Late Jan 2026).
- **Key Statistic:** The **e-Shram Portal** crossed **31 Crore** registrations. Crucially, for the first time, over **12 Major Aggregators** (Zomato, Swiggy, Uber, etc.) have successfully integrated their databases with the portal.
- **Mains Relevance:** This signals the "Formalization of the Informal." The data integration is the first step towards the proposed "**Aggregator Levy,**" ensuring that social security is portable and not tied to a single employer.

## 4. Sanitation Justice: NCSK's 'Zero Fatality' Audit

- **Event:** The **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)** submitted its Annual Report highlights in Jan 2026.
- **Key Finding:** While manual scavenging deaths have reduced, "**Septic Tank Deaths**" (hazardous cleaning) remain a challenge. The Commission flagged the slow adoption of "Robotic Scavengers" (Bandicoot robots) by smaller Municipalities due to funding gaps.
- **Mains Relevance:** Highlights the gap between "**Law**" (**PEMSR Act, 2013**) and "**Technology.**" The report argues that without *mechanization*, the *dignity* of the Safai Karamchari cannot be secured.

## 5. Urban Justice: PMAY-U 2.0 'Rental' Guidelines

- **Event:** MoHUA released operational guidelines for the **Affordable Rental Housing (ARH)** vertical of PMAY-U 2.0.
- **Key Shift:** The guidelines explicitly prioritize "**Inter-State Migrants**" and "**Working Women**" for hostel-style rental accommodations.
- **Mains Relevance:** This addresses "**Housing as a Service.**" It acknowledges that a migrant worker from Bihar in Mumbai doesn't need *ownership* (an asset he can't afford); he needs *affordable rent* (a service to survive).

## 6. Elderly Justice: The 'Silver Economy' Push

- **Event:** NITI Aayog's position paper on "**Senior Care Reforms**" was discussed in the Jan 2026 Pre-Budget meetings.
- **Key Proposal:** A push for "**Assisted Living**" startups under the **SAGE (Seniorcare Aging Growth Engine)** initiative.
- **Mains Relevance:** With the elderly population projected to double by 2050, this marks the rise of the "**Care Economy.**" The focus is shifting from *Family Responsibility* (which is shrinking) to *Institutional Support* (which is nascent).