

POLICY  
BRIEF

## Mission Vatsalya

### ABSTRACT

This Policy Brief provides an analysis of the on-ground implementation of Mission Vatsalya in Maharashtra and presents key actionable recommendations to address the gaps that emerge from the analysis. The Brief is based on review of existing evidence and interviews with those who had tried to access these schemes, conducted at three different locations in Maharashtra - Panvel, Raigad district (urban, peri-urban), Kagal, Kolhapur district (rural) and Chikhaldara, Amravati district (tribal). Detailed Briefs on other schemes aimed at providing support and protection to children and women during pregnancy and a Summary Policy Brief form part of this 6 part series.

## BACKGROUND

Mission Vatsalya was launched by the Government of Maharashtra in August 2021 as an umbrella scheme in the context of the impact of loss of lives because of COVID-19, on children (who lost their parents) and on single/widowed women (who lost earning male members of their family). For ensuring the welfare of the affected children, additions were made to the entitlements under the Bal Sangopan Yojana (see the section and Brief on BSY), and Mission Vatsalya was launched to provide assistance to single/widowed women as well as orphans. Considering that many single/widowed women may not come in contact with government offices and may be unaware of government schemes and procedures, the objective of Mission Vatsalya was to facilitate access to existing schemes.

Based on the concept of “Government at your doorstep”,<sup>1</sup> direct visits are paid to single/widowed women and orphans at their homes and assistance is provided in applying for various welfare schemes of the government<sup>2</sup> including support in accessing necessary documents for availing the welfare schemes.<sup>3</sup> To facilitate the process a Taluka-level Task Force has been headed by the Tehsildar, tasked with the responsibility of identifying affected women and children, and ensuring facilitation of the appropriate schemes. When the scheme was announced in August 2021, there were estimated 15,095 women who had lost their husbands due to COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, the Supreme Court directed governments to provide *ex-gratia* payment of Rs 50,000 to families who lost members due to COVID-19. This amount was to be paid in addition to *the amounts paid by centre and state under other schemes*.<sup>5</sup> As per the directions, the amount was to be paid within 30 days of the submission of the application. As per the guidelines issued by the Government of Maharashtra, next of kin of those who lost their lives due to COVID-19 can apply for compensation if they have a RT-PCR report and Medical Cause of Death Certificate mentioning COVID-19 as the cause of death.<sup>6</sup>

## Present Challenges

The publicity provided to the scheme through newspaper advertisements and mobile messages has helped in creating awareness about the scheme and its processes and entitlements.

### **Inadequate time window for filing of applications:**

In an Order passed by the Supreme Court in the aforementioned case on March 24, 2022, it allowed a time window of 60 days for dependents of those who had died till then to file compensation claims. In exceptional circumstances, those who miss the deadline could approach the Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC). The time window provided by the apex court was too short and a large number of dependents were unable to file claims within the time window, and the process of approaching the GRC was too daunting for them.

**Adequacy of the *ex gratia* payment:** From the interviews conducted, it emerged that most families had incurred substantial expenses during the treatment of the deceased member, and some had even borrowed money to pay for the treatment. Even in cases where the deceased adult member of the family underwent treatment in government facilities, the family has ended up spending over a lakh rupees on the treatment. For these families, the scheme provides relief that they desperately require. The compensation paid under the scheme, in most instances, was utilised to tide over these loans. But the current compensation amount is insufficient even to cover the cost of treatment, and barely compensates the family for the loss of an adult member. In some cases, the surviving earning members will have to work for several years in future to be able to pay the loans taken for meeting the treatment expenses.

**Application Filing and Tracking:** While the applications for the compensation can be filed online, there is presently no way to track the status of the applications and one needs to go to the district office for this. Only the district officials or have access to the status of application. When there are any shortcomings in the

application, the applicant comes to know about this only on visiting the district offices. There is no mechanism to return the application to the applicant, or to intimate the applicant about refiling of fresh applications. The portal has been dysfunctional since Sept-Oct 2022 and no contact details (phone numbers and email-ids) of responsible officials are available on the portal for registering complaints.

**Delay in Payment of Compensation:** In many instances, the payment of the compensation after the submission and acceptance of documents is being delayed by several months. No payments have been made in the year 2022. This is in violation of the directions issued by the Supreme Court. In case of delay, several applicants make several visits to district offices to inquire about their applications, incurring further expenditure.

### **Need for Livelihood Support to Single/Widowed**

**Women:** In several instances, the deceased male member of the family was also the sole earning member. The surviving female adult members have to now bear the sole responsibility of providing for the family, and to fulfil this, they usually take up lesser-paying, unskilled or semi-skilled work. Hence, there is a need to include facilitation of skill-development training and livelihood programmes in the range of schemes being facilitated under the Mission.

## Actionable Recommendations

1. The online application process for availing *ex gratia* payment should also have a public interface where the applicants can check the current status of their applications, any shortcoming in the applications and also be able to rectify the applications.
2. The entire process after the submission and acceptance of documents should be completed and compensation amount should be disbursed within a period of one month as laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Gaurav Kumar Bansal vs Union of India & Others* (WP 539/2021).

3. The *ex gratia* amount needs to be increased to at least Rs 1 lakh, inline with the amount being offered by many other state governments.
4. Employment support including skill development training should be included in the list of schemes being facilitated as part of Mission Vatsalya to support skilled employment for surviving single women.







## Endnotes

- 1 | Department of Women and Child Development, Government Resolution No. Anaath-2021/Pra. Kra.49/Ka-03 dated 27 August 2021.
- 2 | Including Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana, Bal Sangopan Yojana, Shravan Bal Seva State Pension Scheme, Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme, Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme, etc.
- 3 | Ration Card, Heir Certificate, Aadhar Card, Caste Certificate, Bank Account etc.
- 4 | The Hindu, 'COVID-19: Scheme launched in Maharashtra for women who lost their husbands,' August 26, 2021.
- 5 | Order of the Supreme Court dated 04 Oct 2021 in Gaurav Kumar Bansal vs Union of India & Others (WP 539/2021).
- 6 | Department of Revenue and Forest, Government Resolution No. CLS-2021/Pra.Kra.254/Ma-03 dated 26 November 2021.



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