

# Urbanization and Housing Challenges in India: An Analysis of Slum Populations, Homelessness, and Housing Shortages

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to examine and discuss the issues of housing shortages, slum populations, and homelessness in urban India. As Indian cities become increasingly crowded due to the influx of people migrating from rural areas in search of employment and improved living conditions, the demand for housing has surged, resulting in a significant housing shortage. Ensuring affordable shelter and essential amenities for the urban poor presents a major challenge for governments in developing nations like India, where the urban population continues to grow rapidly, often accompanied by an increase in low-income households. This paper aims to explore urbanization and growth of million-plus cities in India and examine the housing shortage in urban areas, with a particular focus on slum populations and homelessness.*

**Keywords:** *Housing shortage, Urbanization, Slum, Homelessness*

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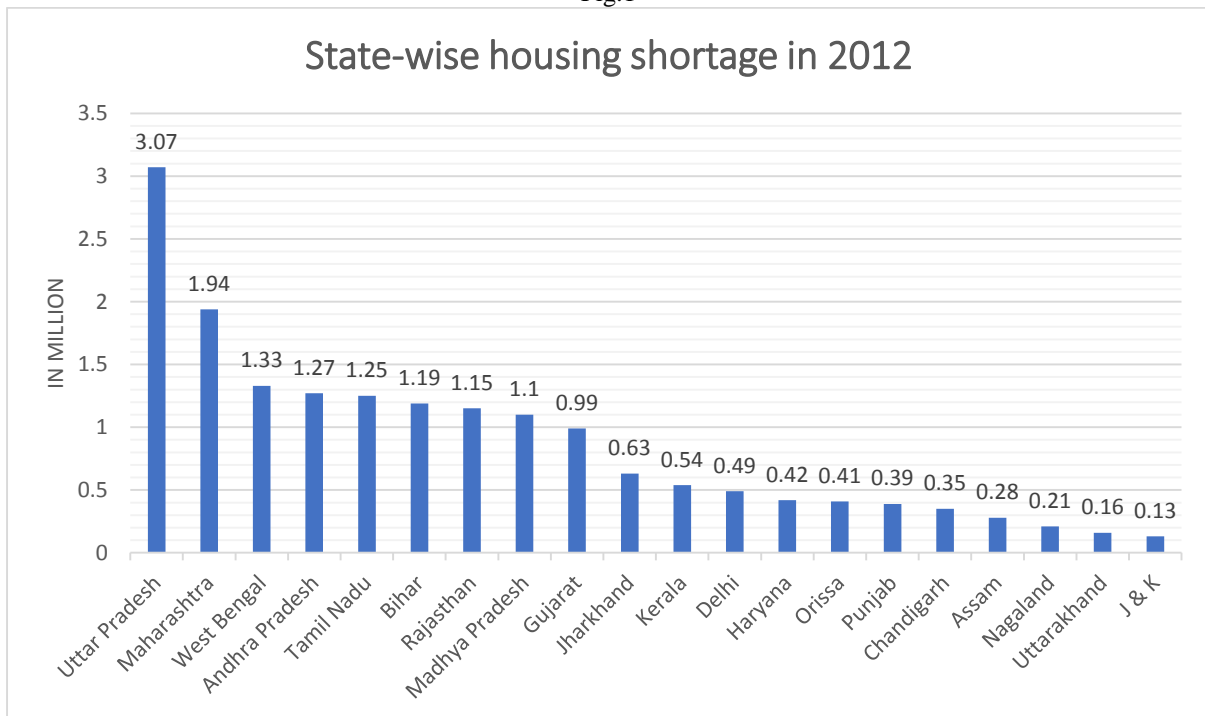
## **I. Introduction**

Housing and related amenities serve as key indicators of a country's human well-being. Statistics on living conditions—such as the types of housing, average space per person, and access to basic civic amenities—provide insight into the socioeconomic progress of a society (GoI, 2013). For most households, housing represents their most significant asset. Recognizing housing's critical role, the New Urban Agenda emphasizes the need for adequate and affordable housing within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, and Goal 11, which seeks to ensure access to adequate housing, basic services, and slum upgrades (Wachter, Hoek-Smit & Kim, 2018). The rapid growth in urban areas, alongside the overall population increase, has led to a rising demand for housing. Many lower-middle-class families in urban centers reside in sub-standard or informal housing that lacks essential amenities. Lower-income and economically disadvantaged groups who move to cities often settle in informal housing with limited access to water and sanitation, driven by affordability constraints.

### **Urban housing shortage by state**

As urbanization accelerates in India, the country's housing shortage has reached 18.78 million units, according to the Technical Group TG-12 on Urban Housing Shortage (2012-2017) from the National Building Organization. Data from the Planning Commission of India shows a steady increase in urban housing shortages, from 5 million units in 1982 to 24.7 million in 2007. However, Technical Group 12 (MoHUPA) reported a decrease in housing shortages to 18.78 million in 2012, primarily due to revisions in the estimation methods over time. The 2018 housing shortage was estimated by including inadequately housed households, encompassing non-slum households in substandard housing, slum households, and the homeless.

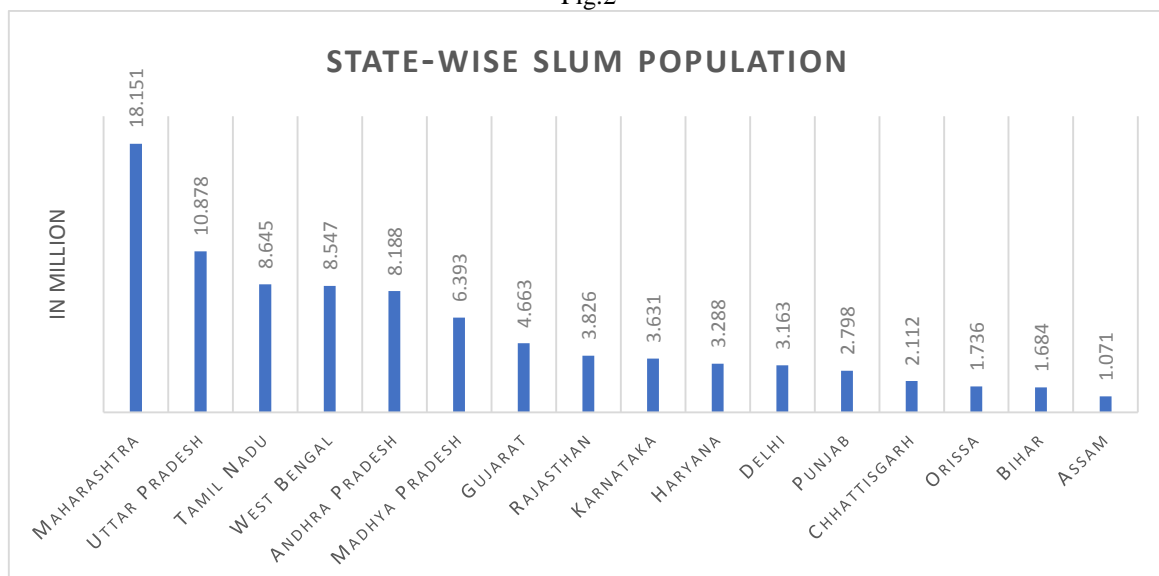
Fig.1



Source: Report of the Technical Group (TG-12) on Urban Housing Shortage 2012-17, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation

Around 76% of India’s total urban housing shortage is concentrated in just ten states, primarily those with the highest urban populations. Uttar Pradesh leads with a shortage of 3.07 million housing units, followed closely by Maharashtra and West Bengal. A significant factor in this housing shortfall is the high number of slum dwellers, whose homes often lack basic amenities and are inadequately constructed. States with the highest slum populations also correspond to those with the most severe housing shortages.

Fig.2

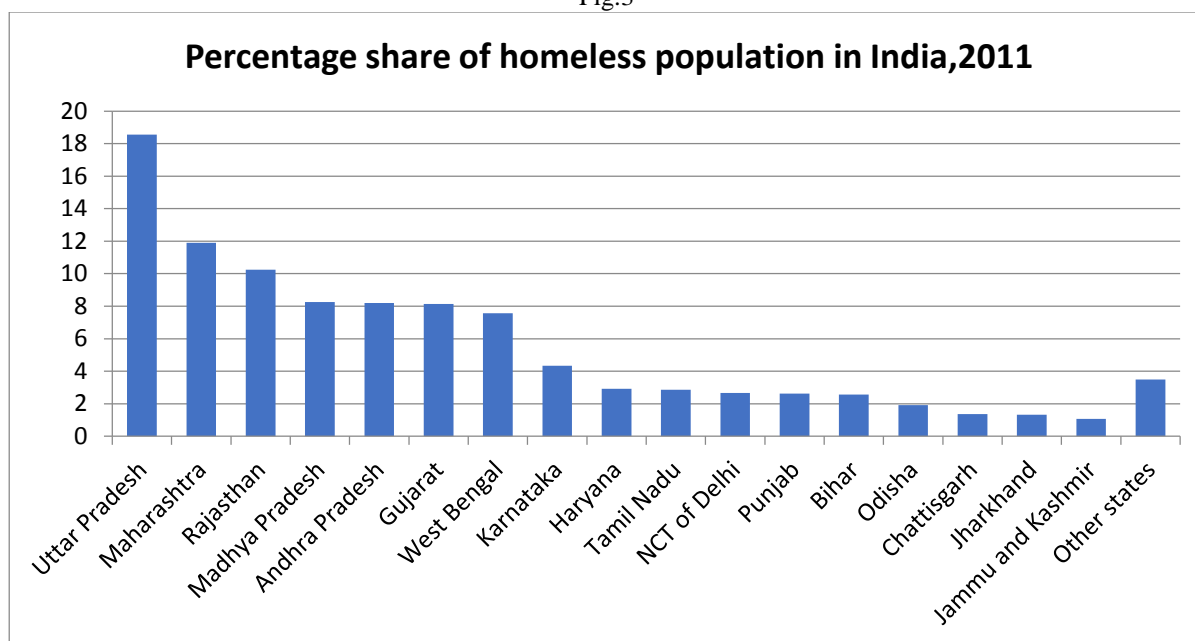


Source:GoI, 2015. Slums in India- A Statistical Compendium, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, National Building Organization.

Another factor which contributes to the housing shortage is homelessness.India is home to 4.5 lakhs houseless families which has total population of 17.73 lakhs living without any support roof cover. The

houseless population in rural areas have decreased but in urban areas it has increased from 7.79 lakh in 2001 to 9.38 lakh in 2011 census, the main reason being movement of people from rural to urban areas.

Fig.3



Source: Census of India (2011), H & HH- Series, Houselisting and housing census data tables and A-series, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, New Delhi. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>

Figures 1, 2, and 3 reveal a clear and concerning relationship between urban housing shortages, slum populations, and homelessness across various Indian states. States with higher concentrations of slum and homeless populations are also the states where housing shortages are most severe. This trend is largely driven by rapid urbanization, as millions of people migrate to urban centers in search of employment, education, and better living conditions.

### Urbanization and growth of million-plus cities in India

Urbanization, defined by Kingsley Davis in 1965 as a progressive concentration of population in urban areas, has followed distinct patterns in developed and developing countries. India exemplifies many typical features of urbanization found in developing nations. Between 2001 and 2011, India's urban population experienced a substantial growth rate of 32%, rising from 285 million to 377 million. During this decade, urban population growth surpassed rural growth for the first time, with a compound annual growth rate of 2.8%, leading to an increase in the urban population proportion from 27.8% in 2001 to 31.2% in 2011. Out of India's total population of 1.21 billion, 377 million now reside in urban areas. With over 10 million individuals joining the urban population each year, this number is projected to reach around 600 million by 2031 (MoHUPA, 2012).

**Table: 1 Total Population, Urban Population and Percentage share of Urban Population, 1951-2011**

Year	Total Population (millions)	No. Of Towns	Urban Population (millions)	Percentage Urban Population	Growth in Urban Population (%)
1951	361.1	2843	62.4	17.3	41.5
1961	439.2	2363	78.9	18.0	26.4
1971	548.2	2590	109.1	19.9	38.3
1981	683.3	3378	159.5	23.3	46.2
1991	846.3	3768	217.6	25.7	36.4
2001	1028.6	5161	285.3	27.8	31.5
2011	1210.8	7933	377.1	31.15	31.8

Source: Chendrayudu&Chandrakarayya, 2020.

Migration is the primary driver of urban population growth in India. Examining recent data reveals that this growth results not only from rural-to-urban migration but also from a considerable share of migration between urban areas. A growing number of people are relocating from smaller towns to larger cities, which offer better employment prospects. Urban-to-urban migration rose significantly from 15.2% in 2001 to 22.6% in 2011, marking a 7.4 percentage-point increase. This trend also contributes to the rise in million-plus cities. From

just five cities in 1951, the number of million-plus cities expanded to 53 by 2011, encompassing a total of 160.71 million people, or 42.62% of India's total urban population.

**Table: 2 Million- Plus Cities in India since 1951 and their populations**

Year	City	Population (in millions)	Proportion of urban Population (%)	Proportion of total Population (%)
1951	5	11.75	18.83	3.25
1971	9	27.84	25.52	5.08
1991	23	70.68	32.75	8.35
2001	35	108.72	38.00	10.57
2011	53	160.71	42.62	13.28

Source: Chendrayudu&Chandrasekarayya, 2020.

The 2011 Census shows that 35.7% of households in metropolitan areas (cities with populations over 1 million) and 30.4% in cities with populations between 100,000 and 1 million experience overcrowded living conditions (Kundu et al., 2016). Many people are drawn to these cities for employment opportunities, which drives high levels of immigration. However, this influx contributes to the growth of informal settlements, as low-income individuals often choose these areas for their more affordable rent.

**Table: 3 Statewise million-plus cities, population and its percentage share in urban population of the state**

State	Million-plus cities	Total Population in million-plus cities	Total urban population in the state	Population of million-plus cities as % of urban population of states
Uttar Pradesh	Ghaziabad UA, Agra UA, Lucknow UA, Meerut UA, Kanpur UA, Allahabad UA, Varanasi UA	14003273	44495063	31.5
Kerala	Malappuram UA, Thrissur UA, Kannur UA, Kollam UA, Kozhikode UA, Thiruvananthapuram UA, Kochi UA	12142240	15934926	76.2
Maharashtra	Vasai Virar City (M.Corp.), Nashik UA, Aurangabad UA, Pune UA, Nagpur UA, Greater Mumbai UA	29935411	50818259	58.9
Gujarat	Surat UA, Rajkot UA, Ahmedabad UA, Vadodara UA	14145745	25745083	54.9
Tamil Nadu	Chennai UA, Coimbatore UA, Tiruchirapalli UA, Madurai UA	13331613	34917440	38.2
Madhya Pradesh	Indore UA, Bhopal UA, Gwalior UA, Jabalpur UA	6420373	20069405	31.9
Chattisgarh	Raipur UA, Durg-Bhilainagar UA	2186632	5937237	36.8
Rajasthan	Jaipur (M.Corp.), Kota (M.Corp.), Jodhpur UA	5212530	17048085	30.6
Jharkhand	Ranchi UA, Jamshedpur UA, Dhanbad UA	3659170	7933061	46.1
Andhra Pradesh	Vijayawada UA, Vishakhapatnam UA	3221522	14610372	22.0
Punjab	Amritsar UA, Ludhiana UA	2797583	10399146	26.9
West Bengal	Asansol UA, Kolkata UA	15355544	29093002	52.8
Haryana	Faridabad (M.Corp.)	1404653	8842103	15.9
Karnataka	Bangalore UA	8499399	23625962	35.9
Bihar	Patna UA,	2046652	11758016	17.4
Telangana	Hyderabad UA,	7749334	13608703	56.9
Jammu & Kashmir	Srinagar UA	1273312	3433242	37.1
Delhi	Delhi UA	16314838	16368899	99.7
Chandigarh	Chandigarh UA	1025682	10266459	99.9
Total	India	160725506	377106125	42.6

Source: Census of India (2011), A-4 Series, Towns and urban agglomerations classified by population size class in 2011 with variation since 1901, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, New Delhi. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>

In India's million-plus cities, the housing shortage is particularly acute. Here, a significant portion of the population resides in slums; in cities like Jabalpur, Visakhapatnam, Greater Mumbai, and Meerut, over 40% of the population lives in slum areas. Additionally, about 38.3% of India's entire slum population resides in cities

with populations exceeding one million. For example, in 15 large cities, slum residents comprise between 25% to 40% of the total population, a figure that underscores how high urban population density, combined with inadequate housing infrastructure, fosters the growth of slums. The influx of people into these large urban areas exacerbates the housing deficit, as many low-income migrants opt for slum areas due to the lower cost of living.

## **II. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study underscores the urgent need to address the interconnected issues of housing shortages, slum populations, and homelessness in urban India. Rapid urbanization, driven by rural-to-urban migration in search of employment and better living conditions, has intensified the demand for housing in cities. As metropolitan areas become more densely populated, limited affordable housing options force low-income residents into slums and informal settlements that lack basic amenities and adequate space. These conditions not only highlight a significant housing shortage but also reveal the socio-economic inequalities that persist across Indian cities.

The findings show that states with large slum populations and high rates of homelessness are experiencing the most acute housing shortages, with more than three-quarters of the shortage concentrated in states with dense urban populations. Although recent government initiatives have attempted to address these challenges, the scale of urbanization and the need for affordable housing call for sustained and adaptive efforts. Solutions must prioritize affordable housing development, upgrading of slum conditions, and provision of essential services to reduce the pressures of urban housing shortages and improve quality of life for India's growing urban poor.

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