Dealing with Homelessness

What is the issue?

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While the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has been expanded to include even the middle classes, little is being done to resolve the issue of homelessness.

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What the official data says?

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- Homeless are those living in a structure without a roof.
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- According to the latest official data, merely 658 shelters have been created since the launch of the Shelter for Homeless programme under the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) in 2013.
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- These shelters across the country cater to a total homeless population of 35,000.
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- This does not even amount to five percent of the total urban homeless population of 9.38 lakh.
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- But the civil society feel that the census figures itself is a gross-underestimate.
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- They estimate the extent of homelessness at 1% of the urban population i.e. 30 lakh people which is thrice the census figures.
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- The low census count is attributed to the difficulties of counting those without a permanent abode or the fact that the census data on homelessness excludes those such as construction labourers who sleep

where they work.
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What does the Supreme Court mandate?

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- As per the norms laid down by the Supreme Court, there has to be one shelter with capacity for 100 persons or two shelters for 50 persons for every one lakh urban population.
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- The SC Commissioner report of 2011, had mandated compliance of these norms within a two-month period.
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- It had also asked for a mapping of homeless population, separate shelters for homeless women, setting aside 30% of the total number of shelters for persons with disabilities, senior citizens or addicts.
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How do states fare?

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- The 658 shelters are only in 18 states.
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- Of these, states such as West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Odisha, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh hold a poor record of creating between one to five shelters each.
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- The maximum number of shelters, around 200, is in Delhi.
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- This is also the direct result of the Supreme Court pulling up the state government in the wake of the mounting homeless deaths in the winter of 2009-10.
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- But Maharashtra with a far greater homeless population than Delhi, has created only 14 shelters.
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- Uttar Pradesh does not have a single new shelter has been built or existing one renovated under NULM in the state.
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What is the reason for poor performance?

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- Mumbai has been the biggest defaulter and has been citing the lack of land as the reason for not providing any new shelters for the homeless.
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- There is also the underlying prejudice that looks at the homeless as migrants who need not be provided for.
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- The poor numbers on ground are matched by the meagre budgetary provisions made for the homeless as compared to housing for the relatively better-off segments.
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- The total budget available for constructing new houses under PMAY is over Rs 6,000 crore. On the other hand, Rs 349 crore is the total provision for entire the NULM of which Shelter for Homeless is just one of the seven components.
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- Therefore what is needed is the ample night shelters and cheap rental units for the homeless. This is how the entire world has dealt with the issue of homelessness.
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Source: The Indian Express

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