

HOMELESSNESS

Shelter is the only way to get rid of many problems. One-way of approach towards a 'Fundamental Right' is that it is sine qua non for human existence and preserves human dignity. The actual beneficiaries of fundamental rights would fail in realizing the same unless they don't have a place to live. Hence, right to education, right to clean drinking water, right to privacy more importantly and the so-called right to life and personal liberty are of no use for those who don't have a roof on their heads. Housing is nothing but a very elementary thing to keep the human body safe, and the deficiency of it will make the human life chaotic.

It is an upsetting state of affairs for any so-called welfare state to have its citizens lying right on the streets and subject to all kinds of social exclusion and vulnerability. The phenomenal example of the failure of democracy and the concept of 'Welfare state' is very well manifested in the extent of the spread of homelessness, which is one of the by-products of poverty and one of the horrible forms of social vulnerability.



INDIA AND RIGHT TO HOUSING

Indian law doesn't explicitly guarantee housing as a fundamental right, but it's interpreted to be included within **Article 21** of the constitution, which protects the right to life and personal liberty. The courts have expanded the meaning of Article 21 to encompass various unenumerated rights, and housing is considered one of them. Initially, the supreme court took a literal approach to interpreting laws. However, starting around 1969, they shifted towards a more rights-oriented approach, often termed "judicial activism."

A key moment in this evolution was the **Maneka Gandhi case**, which led to a significant broadening of Article 21, particularly benefiting the poor. A landmark 1985 case, **Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation**, addressed the plight of slum dwellers facing eviction. The court recognized that eviction could jeopardize people's livelihoods, raising the question of legal recourse for these vulnerable populations. Both basic municipal law and the spirit of the Indian constitution suggest a duty to assist those in need. The Supreme Court has consistently acknowledged the precarious situation of homeless individuals, especially concerning deaths due to extreme weather conditions.



PROBLEM STATEMENT

India faces a significant rural housing crisis characterized by stark regional disparities. While some states grapple with high levels of rural houselessness alongside a surplus of vacant houses, indicating a mismatch between housing availability and accessibility, others experience severe housing shortages with minimal vacant properties.

This disparity highlights systemic issues including affordability barriers, limited rural livelihood opportunities, and ineffective housing policies.

OBJECTIVES

To assess rural homelessness through census data.

To analyse legal interpretation of right to housing.

To determine integration of PMAY and rural houselessness.

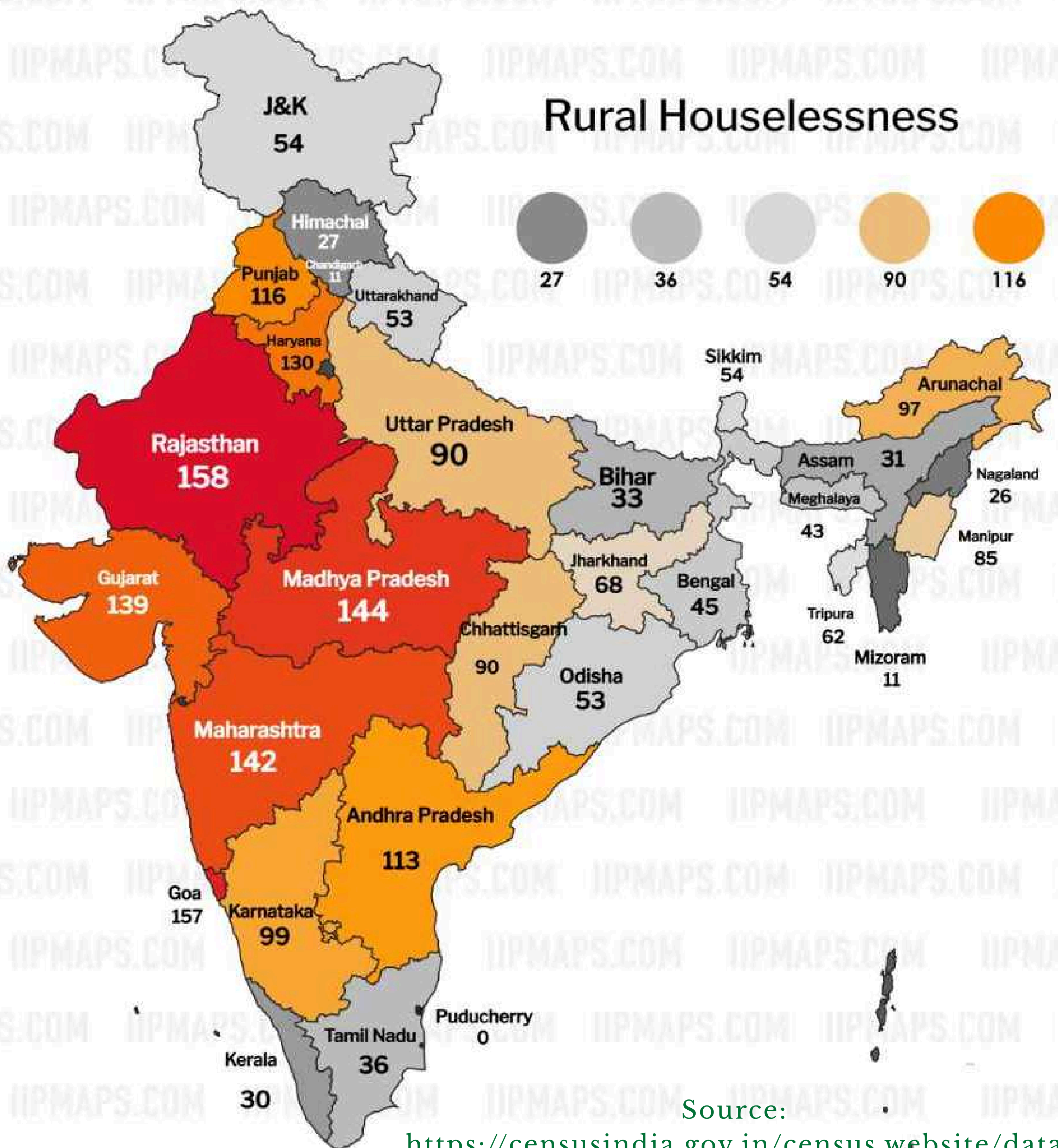


HOUSELESSNESS: UNDERSTANDING CENSUS TERMINOLOGY

<i>Type of Household</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Normal Household</i>	<i>A group of people who live together and usually share meals from a common kitchen unless work exigencies prevent it.</i> <i>They can be related, unrelated, or a mix of both.</i>
<i>Institutional Household</i>	<i>A group of unrelated people living together in an institution, sharing meals from a common kitchen.</i>
<i>Houseless Household</i>	<i>Individuals or groups that do not live in buildings or Census houses but instead reside in open spaces like roadsides, pavements, under bridges, railway platforms, or other non-residential and open public areas.</i>



MAPPING THE GAPS: RURAL HOUSELESSNESS ACROSS INDIAN STATES



Source:

<https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>

RURAL HOMELESSNESS: STATE WISE DISPARITIES

The map 1 reveals rural homelessness per 1,000 people across Indian states.

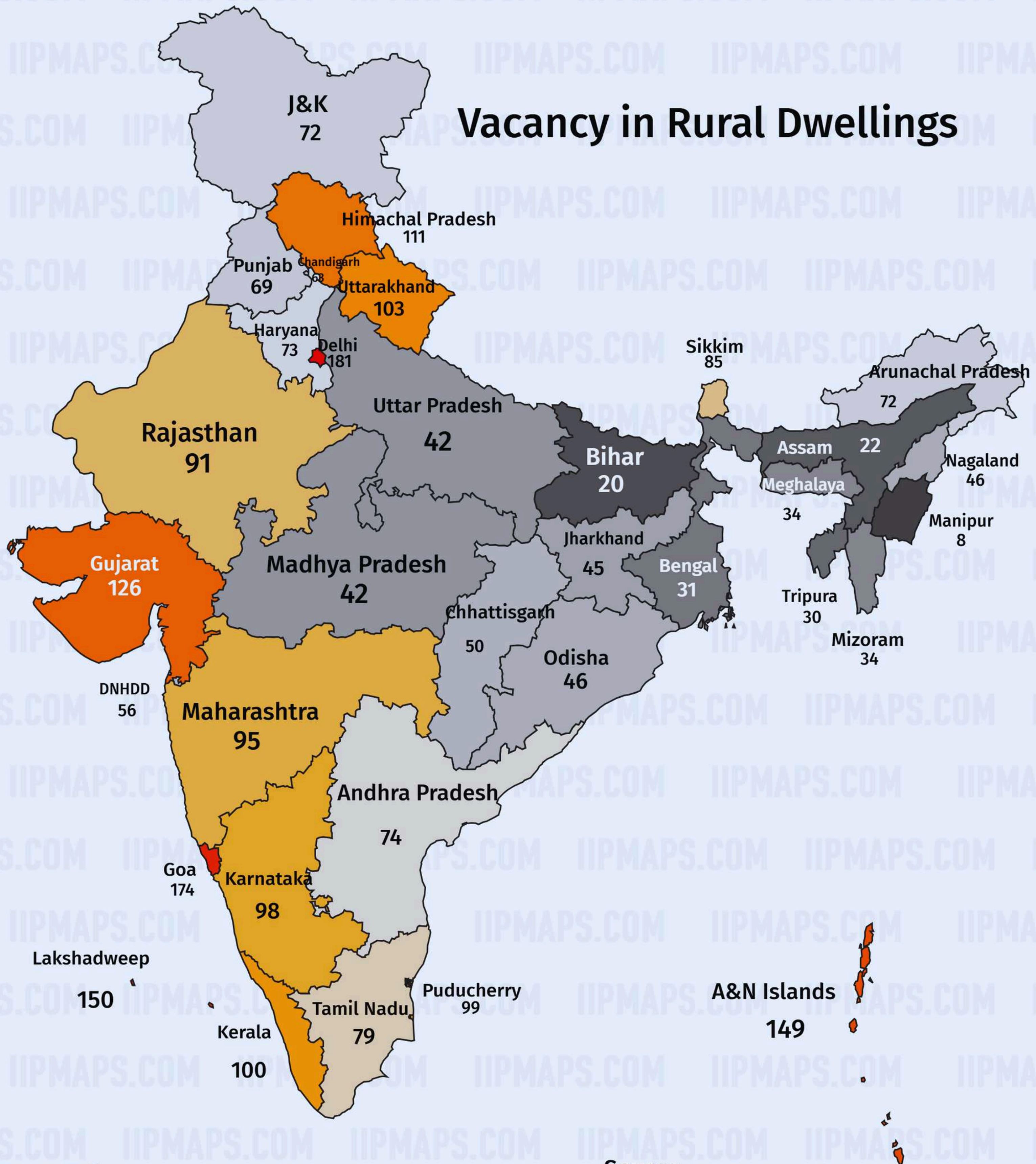
Western and central states like Rajasthan (158), Gujarat (139), and Madhya Pradesh (144) have high rates of rural homelessness.

Northeastern and southern states, show lower rates of rural homelessness.

The uneven distribution of rural homelessness highlights the need for targeted interventions. Interventions should be tailored to each region's specific needs.



Vacancy in Rural Dwellings



Source

<https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>

Source:

<https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>

Map 2 reveals vacant houses per state across Indian states.

- Rajasthan (rural houselessness: 158) exhibits high rural houselessness alongside a large number of vacant houses.
- Goa (rural houselessness: 157) also reports high rural houselessness with a significant number of vacant houses (174).
- Gujarat (rural houselessness: 139) shows considerable rural houselessness with a notable number of vacant houses (126).
- Madhya Pradesh (rural houselessness: 144) faces a severe housing shortage with high rural houselessness and a low number of vacant houses.
- Bihar (rural houselessness: 33) also experiences a severe housing shortage with high rural houselessness and a very low number of vacant houses (20), indicating a need for increased housing infrastructure.



PMAY'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING RURAL HOUSELESSNESS AND VACANCY DISPARITIES

Rural houselessness and vacant housing disparities align with Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), particularly with its Beneficiary-Led Construction (BLC) and Affordable Rental Housing (ARH) verticals.

Beneficiary-Led Construction (BLC):

- Financial assistance for individuals to construct homes.
- Targeted support is needed in high-houselessness states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Affordable Rental Housing (ARH):

- Repurposing vacant homes for affordable rentals.
- States like Goa and Gujarat show high vacancy rates but low accessibility.
- Encouraging policy action to convert vacant homes into rental units.

Integrating census data for targeted PMAY implementation:

- Disparities between houseless populations and vacant housing.
- Using data-driven allocation to optimize PMAY funding.
- Visual tools can help government intervention in high-need regions.



The Challenge of Outdated Data:

However, effectively gauging the impact of PMAY and strategically addressing the disparities in rural houselessness and vacant housing is significantly hampered by the lack of recent census data. The last comprehensive census was conducted in 2011. Without updated figures, it is challenging to accurately assess the current scale and distribution of rural houselessness across Indian states and to understand how PMAY has contributed to alleviating this problem over the past decade.

The Need for Current Data:

A more recent census would provide crucial insights into the evolving housing landscape, allowing for a more targeted and efficient implementation of PMAY. Understanding the current ratios of houseless individuals to vacant properties in different regions is essential for optimizing resource allocation and tailoring interventions through schemes like BLC and ARH.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Repurpose Vacant Houses: States with high numbers of vacant houses, such as Goa (174 vacant houses) and Gujarat (126 vacant houses), should implement policies to repurpose underutilized housing for rural populations in need. This could include incentives for homeowners to rent properties at affordable rates, or government acquisition and redistribution of unused housing stock.

Affordable Housing Schemes: States with high rural houselessness, such as Rajasthan (158 rural houselessness) and Madhya Pradesh (144 rural houselessness), should prioritize the construction of affordable housing in rural areas. This should be coupled with the provision of basic amenities like water, electricity, and sanitation to make these homes livable and attractive to rural populations.

Livelihood Opportunities: To reduce migration and underutilization of rural housing, states should focus on creating livelihood opportunities in rural areas. For example, states like Bihar (20 vacant houses) and Uttar Pradesh (42 vacant houses), which have low vacant houses but significant rural populations, could benefit from promoting rural industries, agriculture-based enterprises, and skill development programs to ensure sustainable income sources.

Data-Driven Resource Allocation: Governments should use census data to identify states with severe housing shortages and allocate resources accordingly. For instance, Madhya Pradesh (144 rural houselessness) and Maharashtra (142 rural houselessness) could be prioritized for targeted interventions, such as subsidies for housing construction or low-interest loans for rural homebuyers, to bridge the gap between housing demand and supply.



CONCLUSION

The analysis of rural homelessness in India reveals significant disparities across states, with some regions facing high levels of homelessness and others struggling with housing shortages despite vacant properties.

These disparities underscore the need for targeted policy interventions that address the specific challenges of each region. Effectively utilizing existing schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and leveraging census data for resource allocation are crucial steps toward mitigating the issue of rural homelessness and ensuring that all citizens have access to adequate shelter.

