

India's First Beggar-Free City

Why in News?

Indore has become the **country's first beggar-free city** after authorities rehabilitated beggars by providing them with employment opportunities and enrolled children involved in begging into schools.

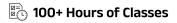
Key Points

- Multi-Phase Campaign Strategy:
 - In February 2024, the city launched an <u>anti-begging campaign</u> under the Women and Child Development Department.
 - At the time, officials identified around 5,000 beggars, including 500 children, living on the streets of Indore.
 - The campaign was conducted in two major phases:
 - Phase 1: Awareness drives to inform the public and engage stakeholders.
 - **Phase 2:** Rehabilitation of beggars through employment assistance and school enrolment for children.
 - Many beggars were found to have migrated from Rajasthan, highlighting inter-state dimensions of urban begging.
- National and International Recognition:
 - The initiative has been recognised as a model project by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 - Indore is among 10 cities selected for a pilot project to eliminate begging in urban areas.
 - A World Bank team has also acknowledged the campaign's impact.

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Legal Framework Regarding Begging

- Colonial Law: The <u>Criminal Tribes Act of 1871</u> criminalised <u>nomadic tribes</u>, associating them with vagrancy and begging.
- Current Legal Framework: The Constitution of India allows both the Union and state governments to enact laws on vagrancy (includes beggary), nomadic, and migratory

tribes under the Concurrent List (List III, Entry 15).

- There is **no central Act on beggary**. Instead, many states and Union Territories have based their laws on the **Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959**.
 - The Act defines a beggar as anyone soliciting alms, performing or offering articles for sale, or appearing destitute without visible means of subsistence.
- Jurisprudence: The Delhi High Court, in 2018, ruled that the Bombay Act (criminalising begging) was arbitrary and violated the right to live with dignity, underscoring the importance of addressing poverty without criminalizing it.
 - The <u>Supreme Court of India</u> in 2021 rejected a <u>Public Interest Litigation</u> seeking to remove beggars from public spaces, emphasizing that begging is a <u>socio-economic</u> problem rather than a <u>criminal issue</u>.
- SMILE: Launched in 2022, Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE) by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, aims to rehabilitate beggars by providing medical care, education, and skills training, working toward a "beggar-free" India by 2026.
 - As of 2024, 970 individuals have rehabilitated under SMILE, including 352 children.

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