



## Ban on Begging

**For Prelims:** [Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sahita](#), [First Information Reports](#), [Concurrent List](#), [Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise](#), [Poverty](#), [Unemployment](#)

**For Mains:** Vulnerable Groups in India, Begging, Legal Framework for Social Welfare in India, Decriminalization of begging.

[Source: IE](#)

### Why in News?

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh has issued a complete **ban on begging across all public places**, following **Indore's example**, as part of efforts to tackle the issue and provide alternative solutions for displaced beggars.

### Why Did Bhopal Implement a Ban on Begging?

- **Reasons for Ban on Begging:** The ban was triggered by reports of **begging at traffic signals**, religious sites, and tourist spots, causing **traffic disruptions** and **accidents**.
  - Authorities also revealed that **many beggars come from other states and have criminal records** or are involved in illicit activities, emphasizing the need for immediate action to ensure public safety and prevent further hazards.
- **Legal Action:**
  - Bhopal, under Section 163 of [Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sahita \(BNSS\)](#) (empowers magistrates to issue urgent orders in nuisance cases), has banned begging district-wide.
    - Additionally, **BNSS Section 223 punishes people who disobey orders** that have been officially given by public servants.
  - This ban follows the actions of Indore, which imposed a **similar ban earlier this year**, including filing [first information reports \(FIRs\)](#) against violators.

### What is the Legal Framework Regarding Begging?

- **Colonial Law:** The [Criminal Tribes Act of 1871](#) criminalised **nomadic tribes**, 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** was arbitrary and violated the right to live with dignity, underscoring the importance of addressing poverty without criminalizing it.

- The [Supreme Court of India in 2021](#) rejected a [Public Interest Litigation](#) seeking to remove beggars from public spaces, emphasizing that begging is a **socio-economic problem** rather than a **criminal issue**.
- **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.

**Note:** As per [Census 2011](#), India has around 413670 beggars and vagrants. **West Bengal leads** with the highest number of beggars, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

## Why is Begging Prevalent in India?

- **Economic Hardship:** [Poverty, unemployment](#), and [underemployment](#) are major drivers of begging.
  - [Rural-to-urban migration](#) among marginalised people often leads to destitution, forcing individuals into begging.
- **Social and Cultural Factors:** The [caste system](#) has historically marginalized certain communities, leaving them with limited opportunities.
  - In some cultures, begging is considered a **hereditary occupation** (e.g., Nats, Bajigars, and Sains).
- **Physical and Mental Disabilities:** Lack of healthcare and rehabilitation services pushes **disabled individuals into begging**.
  - Many [mentally ill individuals](#) are abandoned and resort to begging for survival.
- **Natural Disasters:** [Floods, droughts, and earthquakes](#) displace people, pushing them into extreme poverty and begging.
- **Organized Begging Rings:** [Human traffickers](#) and criminal syndicates exploit **women and children** for forced begging infringing upon [Article 23](#) (prohibits trafficking in human beings, slavery, or exploitation).
  - Babies are often drugged to appear sick and increase sympathy-driven donations.

## What are the Impact of Begging on Society?

- **Public Health and Hygiene Risks:** Begging hotspots often **lack sanitation**, leading to the **spread of diseases**.
  - Malnourished beggars suffer from severe health issues, burdening [public healthcare systems](#).
- **Crime and Exploitation:** Organized begging rings engage in **child trafficking and forced labor**. The risk of **drug addiction and substance abuse** is high among beggars.
- **Tourism and Urban Spaces:** Aggressive begging in cities **affects tourism and damages India's global image**.
  - Increased **street begging leads to security concerns** and public nuisance complaints.
- **Human Rights Violations:** Many beggars are arrested under **anti-begging laws without alternative rehabilitation**.
  - The **definition of a beggar** continues to reflect colonial-era prejudices, which often include **nomadic tribes and the poor** as targets of legal action.
  - These laws can sometimes give authorities the power to **round up the poor or those seen as incompatible** with the urban aesthetic.

## Way Forward

- **Addressing Begging Rings:** Strict enforcement of anti-trafficking laws to dismantle **begging cartels** under the [Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita \(BNS\), 2023](#) through better coordination between police, [Non-governmental Organizations \(NGOs\)](#), and child welfare organizations.
  - Penalizing **exploitative begging syndicates**. Focus on rehabilitation rather than

imprisonment.

- **Community Sensitisation:** Raise awareness about the harms of encouraging beggary and **promote donations to credible charities** and community projects, ensuring funds support rehabilitation efforts.
- **Urban Planning and Homeless Support:** Increase the number of government-run night shelters with better facilities.
  - Provide skill training and employment opportunities to help beggars integrate into society.
- **Policy Framework:** Formulate policies targeting underlying issues such as **unemployment, and social exclusion**, focusing on prevention.
  - Synchronize efforts across ministries like **Social Justice, Urban Affairs, and Labour** to create holistic solutions that address the complex nature of beggary.
- **Local Partnerships:** Collaborate with **local businesses and industries to provide sustainable livelihoods** for rehabilitated individuals, ensuring long-term economic stability.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Begging in India is a reflection of socio-economic inequalities and policy failures rather than an individual choice." Discuss the possible solutions to address the issue of begging in India.

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