

Govt panel finds 28 % of urban Indians living in slums

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The country's urban poor population has risen by at least 7 per cent as against the total urban population in the last decade. According to the draft report of a government panel, tier II and tier III cities registered much higher growth in slum populations than metros.

The latest estimates, arrived at by a committee constituted by the housing and urban poverty alleviation ministry, reveals that the number of urban poor, or slum population residing in towns and cities, increased to almost 28 per cent from 21 per cent. The number of urban poor, as per the 2001 Census, was estimated to be 52.4 million, or 21 per cent of the total urban population of around 250 million. Set up to provide an estimation of urban poor or slum population in different states, the committee, headed by chief statistician Pronab Sen, would finalise its reports in a month's time, a senior government official told The Indian Express.

"The draft report points out that the tier II and III cities have recorded much higher slum population. These estimates would help in better targeting of social sector schemes," said another senior ministry official. With the aim of making India slum-free, the ministry has announced an ambitious scheme — Rajiv Awas Yojana — the preparatory framework for which calls for enumeration of slums. In the next step, the ministry would physically identify slums and undertake mapping. "The committee has also recommended ways to physically identify these slums," said the official.

The 2001 Census took into account only notified slums in 1,764 towns across the country, a major reason for the total urban poor population being underreported, said the official. "This committee has taken into account all the 5,161 towns and has also modified the definition of slum as followed by the Registrar General of India (RGI) which conducts the Census," said the official. Another reason for the rise in numbers is the expanding city limits.

"These periphery areas may include slum-like living conditions but not necessarily slums. Most of the municipalities do not notify slum areas leading to underreporting," said the official. The trend is particularly prevalent in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, said officials.

On the insistence of the committee, the RGI has now agreed that they would identify enumeration blocks where more than 20 households exist without a concrete roof, and possess slum-like characteristics. As of now, only those slums were taken into account that had been notified by the local authorities and consisted of at least 60-70 households.

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