

# Delhi's Transformation: Striving for World-Class Status as India's Capital

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## *Abstract*

This research report compares the quality of life in Delhi with other major Indian cities, focusing on key indicators such as healthcare, education, public transport, air quality, employment opportunities, cost of living, safety, and public services. While Delhi excels in education and employment opportunities, it faces significant challenges related to air quality, infrastructure, and public healthcare. The city's moderate safety levels and public services further impact its livability. Governance plays a critical role in shaping these factors, and improvements in environmental regulation, urban management, and policy coordination could elevate Delhi's quality of life. The study highlights the need for sustainable development to balance economic growth and enhance living standards in the capital.

**Keywords:** *Quality of life, healthcare, education, public transport, air quality, employment, cost of living, safety, public services, governance, urban development, sustainability.*

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## 1. Introduction

Delhi has been always at the heart of India's urban transformation. As the country's capital and one of its largest cities, Delhi represents the nation's political, economic, and cultural pulse. The city's ability to maintain a high quality of life while addressing growing urbanization challenges is key to its future as a world-class capital. Delhi has made significant strides in education, public transportation, and economic growth, yet these successes are often overshadowed by issues like air pollution, income inequality, healthcare shortcomings, and urban sprawl.

Delhi's story mirrors that of many fast-growing cities around the world: rapid development comes with challenges that require thoughtful governance, strategic investments, and policies that address both the immediate and long-term needs of its citizens. This article explores the key developmental shifts that have shaped the city in the past five years and outlines the critical steps policymakers must take for Delhi to truly become a world-class city.

## 2. Income Growth and Economic Stability: A Balanced but Unequal Economy

The economic well-being of Delhiites has undergone significant changes over the past few years, as illustrated by the distribution of income across different population quintiles. According to PRICE's ICE 360 data, the income distribution between 2015-16, 2020-21 (the pandemic year), and 2023-24 highlights how residents of Delhi navigated the period before, during, and after the COVID-19 crisis. The data reflects not only income disparities but also the varied impacts of economic shocks across different income groups, along with their subsequent recovery.

In the pre-pandemic period of 2015-16, Delhi's income distribution showed moderate inequality, with the top 20% (Q5) of the population controlling 42.4% of the total income, while the bottom 20% (Q1) held 8.3%. Middle-income groups also held a reasonable share, with the second quintile (Q2) earning 12% and

the third quintile (Q3) receiving 15.7% of the income. The ratio of the income share between the top quintile (Q5) and the bottom quintile (Q1) was 5.1, indicating moderate inequality. The Gini ratio of 0.355 further supported this, signalling that while income disparity existed, it was not extreme, allowing room for economic mobility for lower and middle-income groups.

### How Pandemic made Delhiites Poorer and Richer?

Per capita income based population quintile	Share of income by per capita population quintile		
	FY16	FY21	FY24
Q1 (Bottom 20%)	8.3%	0.8%	8.3%
Q2 (Lower middle 20%)	12.0%	5.1%	11.0%
Q3 (Middle 20%)	15.7%	8.9%	18.8%
Q4 (Upper middle 20%)	21.6%	18.3%	21.2%
Q5 (Richest 20%)	42.4%	67.0%	40.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Ratio Q5/Q1- Delhi	5.1	83.8	4.9
Gini ratio-Delhi	0.355	0.454	0.339

**Source:** PRICE’s ICE 360 Surveys (2016, 2021 and 2024)

However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 significantly disrupted this balance, leading to a dramatic increase in inequality. With lockdowns and widespread economic restrictions, the top quintile’s share of income skyrocketed to 67%, while the bottom quintile’s share collapsed to just 0.8%. The sharp decline in the income share of the poorest sections of society reflects the pandemic’s devastating economic impact on low-income earners, particularly those in informal or daily wage-based jobs.

Occupations hit hardest during the lockdown included construction workers, domestic workers, street vendors, and those employed in small businesses, restaurants, retail shops, and transportation services like auto-rickshaw drivers and ride-hailing app drivers. Many of these workers operated in the informal sector, which offered little job security or financial safety nets. The closures of markets, restaurants, malls, and construction sites meant that millions of Delhi’s workers lost their primary sources of income almost overnight. Migrant laborers, in particular, were among the most vulnerable, often finding themselves stranded with no work, food, or means of returning home.

Middle-income earners, too, suffered losses. Workers in small and medium enterprises, salaried employees in sectors like travel, hospitality, and non-essential retail, and self-employed individuals saw significant drops in income. The data shows that the income share of Q2 and Q3 dropped to 5.1% and 8.9%, respectively, reflecting the widespread reduction in earnings across both lower and middle-income groups. The wealthier sections, by contrast, saw their share increase dramatically, as those working in more secure sectors like technology, finance, and essential services continued to maintain or even increase their income during this period.

The ratio of Q5 (top 20%) to Q1 (bottom 20%) surged to an extraordinary 83.8, reflecting the massive gulf between the wealthiest and the poorest in Delhi during the lockdown. Similarly, the Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, rose sharply to 0.454, signalling that the pandemic had severely exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in the city.

By 2023-24, however, there were signs of recovery and rebalancing in income distribution. The top quintile's share of income dropped to 40.6%, closer to its pre-pandemic levels, while the bottom quintile's share rebounded to 8.3%, indicating that the city's lower-income groups managed to recover some of their lost earnings. Middle-income groups, particularly the third quintile (Q3), saw their share rise significantly to 18.8%, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. This reflects the reopening of businesses, revival of the service sector, and the return of employment opportunities for those previously employed in informal and low-wage jobs.

The Q5/Q1 ratio dropped sharply to 4.9, indicating a reduction in inequality compared to the pandemic period, and even slightly below the pre-pandemic ratio of 5.1. Similarly, the Gini coefficient fell to 0.339, suggesting a more equitable income distribution than in 2015-16. This recovery suggests that lower-income and middle-income groups benefited from policy measures, such as cash transfers, food security programs, and employment schemes that were implemented during and after the pandemic to help those who were most affected.

Thus, while the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated income inequality in Delhi, particularly for those working in informal and daily wage-based jobs, the post-pandemic recovery has led to a more balanced distribution of income. The data suggests that lower-income groups have regained their economic footing, and middle-income earners have seen improvements as well. However, the pandemic has underscored the need for stronger social safety nets, more inclusive economic policies, and better protections for vulnerable workers to prevent such extreme disparities in the event of future crises.

Delhi has remained a strong economic center, with per capita income rising from ₹3,20,000 in 2019 to ₹4,00,000 in 2023. However, income inequality has become a growing issue, with the top 20% of Delhi's population seeing substantial income growth, while the bottom 20% continues to face financial instability. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this divide, with informal and daily wage workers bearing the brunt of economic hardship during lockdowns.

Cities like Kolkata and Surat, which have experienced higher overall income growth, are benefiting from industrialization, whereas Delhi's economic growth is more balanced across various sectors, including finance, government services, and trade. However, there is still a need to diversify the economy to ensure that income growth benefits a broader section of society.

To bridge the growing income inequality in Delhi, the government should focus on redistributive strategies such as job training programs, particularly aimed at upskilling low- and middle-income workers. Creating opportunities in high-growth sectors like technology, manufacturing, and green energy will provide more inclusive job prospects for a broader section of society. Additionally, social safety nets must be strengthened for informal and daily wage workers. Ensuring access to unemployment benefits, affordable healthcare, and financial assistance during crises will help protect vulnerable populations and reduce the income gap between the wealthiest and poorest segments of society.

### 3. Delhi vs. India: A Comparative Analysis of Income Inequality Trends

When comparing the income distribution trends of Delhi with all-India figures between 2015-16, 2020-21, and 2023-24, distinct patterns emerge, revealing how Delhi’s economic trajectory during the pandemic and recovery periods aligns with and diverges from national trends. Both sets of data highlight the impact of COVID-19 on income inequality, but there are notable differences in how Delhi, as a major urban center, contrasts with the broader national picture.

**Pre-Pandemic Period (2015-16):** In the pre-pandemic period, the income distribution trends of both Delhi and India showed moderate levels of inequality. Nationally, the top 20% (Q5) held 44.9% of total income, while the bottom 20% (Q1) controlled 7.0%. The middle-income groups (Q2 and Q3) received 10.9% and 15.2%, respectively. In Delhi, income distribution was slightly more balanced, with the top 20% holding a lower share (42.4%) and the bottom 20% controlling a slightly larger share (8.3%) compared to the national average.

The ratio of the income share of the top quintile to the bottom quintile (Q5/Q1) was 6.4 for India and 5.1 for Delhi, indicating that inequality in Delhi was less pronounced compared to the national average in 2015-16. Similarly, the Gini coefficient, which measures overall income inequality, was lower for Delhi (0.355) than for India (0.395), again suggesting that Delhi had a somewhat more equitable income distribution before the pandemic.

#### How Pandemic made Indians Poorer and Richer?

Per capita income based population quintile	Share of income by per capita population quintile		
	FY16	FY21	FY24
Q1 (Bottom 20%)	7.0%	3.3%	6.2%
Q2 (Lower middle 20%)	10.9%	7.2%	10.2%
Q3 (Middle 20%)	15.2%	12.3%	14.9%
Q4 (Upper middle 20%)	22.1%	20.9%	22.3%
Q5 (Richest 20%)	44.9%	56.3%	46.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Ratio Q5/Q1- <b>India</b>	6.4	17.1	7.5
Gini ratio- <b>India</b>	0.395	0.528	0.410

**Source:** PRICE’s ICE 360 Surveys (2016, 2021 and 2024)

**Pandemic Impact (2020-21):** The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on income distribution across the country, but its effects were even more extreme in Delhi. Nationally, the income share of the top 20% (Q5) jumped to 56.3%, while the bottom 20% (Q1) saw their share decline to 3.3%. Middle-income groups (Q2 and Q3) also experienced a reduction in their share, with Q2 dropping to 7.2% and Q3 falling to 12.3%. However, in Delhi, the disparities were even more dramatic: the top quintile captured an overwhelming 67% of total income, while the bottom quintile’s share plummeted to just 0.8%.

This stark difference is further highlighted by the Q5/Q1 ratio. For India as a whole, the ratio surged to 17.1, indicating a significant widening of the gap between the richest and poorest. In Delhi, however, the gap was even more extreme, with the Q5/Q1 ratio skyrocketing to 83.8, far surpassing the national average. The Gini coefficient tells a similar story: while India's Gini ratio increased to 0.528 during the pandemic, Delhi's rose to 0.454. This suggests that while inequality worsened both nationally and in the capital, the extent of inequality was even more pronounced in Delhi due to its urban nature and the higher concentration of wealth among the top earners.

The pandemic disproportionately impacted lower-income groups across the country, but in Delhi, this effect was magnified due to the nature of the city's economy. A significant portion of Delhi's workforce comprises informal workers, daily wage earners, and those employed in sectors such as construction, domestic services, street vending, and transportation—industries that were hit hardest by the lockdowns. In contrast, the wealthiest segments, often employed in sectors such as finance, technology, and online services, were more insulated from the pandemic's economic fallout, further widening the gap.

**Post-Pandemic Recovery (2023-24):** By 2023-24, both Delhi and India showed signs of recovery in terms of income distribution, although inequality remained a challenge. Nationally, the top quintile's income share decreased to 46.4%, closer to pre-pandemic levels, while the bottom quintile's share recovered to 6.2%. The middle-income groups (Q2 and Q3) also saw improvement, with Q2 capturing 10.2% of the income and Q3 returning to 14.9%.

In Delhi, the recovery was more pronounced. The top quintile's share of income dropped to 40.6%, slightly below the national average, and the bottom quintile rebounded to 8.3%, marking a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels. Middle-income groups, particularly Q3, saw significant gains, with their share rising to 18.8%, which was higher than both the pre-pandemic and national averages.

The Q5/Q1 ratio for India dropped to 7.5, indicating a substantial reduction in inequality from the pandemic peak but still slightly above pre-pandemic levels. For Delhi, the Q5/Q1 ratio fell sharply to 4.9, reflecting an even greater reduction in inequality, bringing the city to a more equitable distribution of income than both its pre-pandemic state and the national average. Similarly, the Gini coefficient for India decreased to 0.41, while Delhi's fell to 0.339, suggesting that post-pandemic, Delhi's income inequality has improved significantly and is now below the national level.

### ***Key Differences and Implications***

- ***Urban vs. National Economic Structure:*** The nature of Delhi's economy, with its concentration of high-paying sectors and informal labor markets, resulted in a more severe impact on income inequality during the pandemic compared to the national average. Informal and lower-wage workers in Delhi were hit harder, leading to a more pronounced disparity during the lockdown.

Nationally, while rural areas and smaller towns were also affected by the pandemic, the presence of agricultural work and smaller informal economies meant that the income shock was not as extreme as in a highly urbanized setting like Delhi.

- ***Post-Pandemic Recovery:*** Both Delhi and the nation as a whole saw improvements in income distribution by 2023-24, but Delhi's recovery was faster and more robust in terms of reducing



inequality. This could reflect the stronger rebound of urban services, industries, and employment opportunities in the capital city.

The national trends indicate a broader recovery, but one that has not fully closed the inequality gap created by the pandemic. Meanwhile, Delhi's lower Q5/Q1 ratio and Gini coefficient suggest that targeted recovery policies and economic reopening may have had a more pronounced positive effect in the city.

### ***Policy Considerations:***

For Delhi, the extreme inequality seen during the pandemic highlights the need for stronger safety nets and policies that support informal workers and low-income households, who are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks.

At the national level, while the post-pandemic recovery is promising, sustained efforts will be needed to ensure that the gap between the richest and poorest does not widen again, especially in the face of future economic disruptions.

In conclusion, while both Delhi and India experienced heightened inequality during the pandemic, the recovery in Delhi has been more dramatic, bringing the city back to a more equitable distribution of income. However, the vulnerability of lower-income groups during the crisis serves as a reminder that robust social protection systems are crucial to prevent such disparities in future crises.

## **4. Public Transport: A Lifeline Amidst Traffic Congestion**

Delhi's public transport and infrastructure tell a more complex story. While the city has developed an impressive metro network and a variety of public transport options, the overall quality of its infrastructure is under strain from overpopulation and persistent traffic congestion. The Delhi Metro, one of the best in India, has been a major success, offering residents a reliable, affordable, and environmentally friendly alternative to personal vehicles. However, other aspects of the city's transport system, such as poor road conditions, frequent traffic jams, and air pollution, detract from this achievement.

In comparison to cities like Chennai and Mumbai, which also have strong transport systems but face less severe traffic congestion, Delhi's infrastructure still has significant room for improvement. For example, although the metro has helped ease the pressure on public transport, the city's roads are still overwhelmed. This is partly due to the heavy influx of vehicles from neighboring cities like Noida and Gurgaon. The increase in car ownership, from 20% to 25% between 2019 and 2024, while still lower than cities like Bengaluru (37%) and Mumbai (38%), contributes to the traffic challenges. Despite this, many residents continue to rely on public transport due to the notorious traffic jams and limited parking options in Delhi.

To address these challenges, Delhi needs to focus on expanding a multi-modal transport system. This system should integrate the metro with other forms of transport, like buses, electric rickshaws, and cycle tracks, to improve last-mile connectivity. Cities like Copenhagen and Tokyo offer good examples of how integrated transport networks can reduce congestion and improve the quality of life for residents. Delhi could benefit from implementing similar intelligent traffic management systems that use real-time data to optimize traffic flow, reducing jams in high-density areas.

In addition, exploring options like congestion pricing, which has been successfully implemented in cities like London and Singapore, could help reduce traffic in the most congested parts of the city. Investment in pedestrian-friendly spaces and bicycle-sharing programs, as seen in cities like Amsterdam and Paris, would also help reduce reliance on private vehicles, making Delhi’s urban mobility more sustainable in the long run.

### Quality of life Indicators- Selected Cities and All India

Sl. No.	Region	Healthcare	Education	Public Transport & Infrastructure	Air Quality & Environment	Employment Opportunities	Cost of Living	Safety	Public Services
1	Ahmedabad	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
2	Bengaluru	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
3	Chandigarh	High	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
4	Chennai	High	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
5	Delhi	Moderate	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
6	Faridabad	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
7	Greater Mumbai	High	High	High	Low	High	Low	Moderate	Moderate
8	Gurgaon	High	High	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
9	Kolkata	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate
10	Noida	High	High	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
11	Pune	High	High	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	High
12	Surat	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
	All India	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Source: Author’s observations based on multiple reports and surveys<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The comparison of quality-of-life indicators for various Indian cities is based on general observations from multiple reports and surveys that assess urban development and livability in India. Key sources include:

- **Mercer Quality of Living Survey:** This survey assesses cities globally on various factors like health, education, public services, and safety.
- **Ease of Living Index (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India):** This index evaluates the quality of life in Indian cities based on parameters like infrastructure, governance, and services.
- **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO):** Provides data on employment, healthcare, and education.
- **Air Quality Index (Central Pollution Control Board, CPCB):** Data on pollution levels and environmental quality across Indian cities.
- **India City Competitiveness Report:** A report that evaluates cities based on economic performance, employment opportunities, and infrastructure.
- **World Health Organization (WHO):** Reports on healthcare and urban living standards in Indian cities.
- **Public Transport Reports:** Various city-level reports on public transport and infrastructure projects, such as metro systems in Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai.
- **Crime Data (National Crime Records Bureau, NCRB):** Provides insights into safety and crime statistics across Indian cities.



## 5. Environmental Challenges: Battling Air Pollution

A critical issue that severely affects the quality of life in Delhi is its air quality. The city frequently experiences hazardous pollution levels, especially during the winter months. Compared to cities like Chandigarh, Pune, and Bengaluru, which maintain moderate to high standards of air quality and environmental health, Delhi struggles with severe pollution, negatively impacting public health and overall livability. Addressing environmental governance is crucial, requiring stricter regulations on vehicle emissions, industrial pollution, and a focus on expanding green spaces.

Delhi's air pollution has been one of its most significant challenges in recent years. Ranked among the most polluted cities globally, its air quality worsens dramatically in winter due to factors such as vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and crop residue burning from neighboring states. Although short-term measures, like the Odd-Even traffic rule, have been introduced to reduce vehicular emissions, these efforts have not tackled the root causes of the pollution crisis.

In comparison, cities like Chandigarh and Pune have managed to sustain cleaner air through stricter regulations and more sustainable urban planning. Learning from such cities, Delhi has the potential to not only improve the quality of life for its residents but also enhance its global image as a more liveable, cleaner city.

Key strategies to combat Delhi's air pollution include enforcing stricter emissions regulations for both vehicles and industries, supported by strong compliance measures. Promoting the use of electric vehicles (EVs) through subsidies and developing the necessary infrastructure, such as EV charging stations, will also reduce vehicular emissions. Globally, cities like Oslo and Singapore have made substantial progress in reducing pollution by promoting EV adoption and setting up robust public charging networks.

Expanding green spaces and urban forests should be prioritized as they act as natural pollution buffers. Best practices from cities like New York and Singapore, where rooftop gardens and vertical greenery are encouraged, offer valuable lessons. These initiatives can help reduce the urban heat island effect and create cleaner air zones, particularly in densely populated areas. By adopting such comprehensive measures, Delhi can take significant steps toward improving its air quality and creating a more sustainable, healthier urban environment.

## 6. Housing and Urban Planning: The Affordable Housing Conundrum

Housing affordability remains a pressing issue in Delhi, particularly as rapid urbanization has driven up real estate prices. The influx of people moving to the city has created a demand for affordable housing that outstrips supply, leading to the growth of informal settlements and pushing many middle- and lower-income residents to the outskirts. Compared to cities like Noida and Gurgaon, which have newer developments and more available land for housing projects, Delhi's saturated urban core presents significant challenges in developing affordable housing within the city limits.

Slum rehabilitation remains an urgent issue. Many Delhiites living in informal settlements lack access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, and electricity, further deepening the socio-economic divide.

To address the housing shortage and rising real estate prices in Delhi, policymakers should incentivize the development of affordable housing through public-private partnerships. Financial incentives for

developers could encourage construction within the city limits, providing more affordable options for middle- and lower-income residents. Mixed-use zoning should be promoted to create integrated neighborhoods where people can live, work, and access amenities, reducing the pressure on residential-only areas. A key focus must also be placed on slum rehabilitation programs, which would provide modern housing with essential services like sanitation, clean water, and electricity, improving living conditions for many of the city's underserved populations.

## 7. Healthcare and Education: Delhi's Dual Realities

Delhi offers moderate access to healthcare, similar to cities like Ahmedabad and Faridabad. While the city has decent medical infrastructure, there are notable gaps, particularly in public healthcare services. These gaps result in long waiting times and uneven access to care. In contrast, cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai provide better healthcare services, with excellent access to both public and private hospitals. Delhi's healthcare challenges underscore the need for improvements in public services and a more equitable distribution of healthcare resources to serve its large urban population.

On the education front, however, Delhi excels. It boasts high standards comparable to cities like Bengaluru and Pune, with a strong presence of top-tier public and private schools, as well as well-regarded higher education institutions. This makes Delhi a key educational hub, helping to cultivate a highly competitive workforce. The city's educational strengths give it a distinct advantage over places with more limited opportunities. Although Delhi has long been recognized for its educational excellence, its healthcare system, particularly the public sector, has struggled to keep pace. The city's renowned educational institutions continue to attract students from across the country, reinforcing its status as an academic powerhouse.

However, Delhi's public healthcare system faces significant challenges, including overcrowded hospitals, long waiting times, and inconsistent access to medical care. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities, as public hospitals were overwhelmed by the surge in demand. In comparison, cities like Mumbai and Chennai have better-integrated public-private healthcare systems, ensuring that a wider section of society can access quality care. Delhi needs to invest more in its public healthcare infrastructure to address the growing gap between its expanding population and the limited medical resources available.

To address these healthcare challenges, policymakers should prioritize building new clinics, expanding hospital capacities, and hiring more healthcare workers, particularly in underserved areas. Encouraging public-private partnerships can help improve healthcare service delivery for all income groups, while preventive healthcare initiatives, such as vaccination drives, health awareness campaigns, and regular screenings, should be expanded to address issues before they become critical. While Delhi's education system remains a strong point, improving healthcare is essential for the city's overall well-being.

## 8. Employment Opportunities and Cost of Living: High Potential

Delhi stands out for its abundant employment opportunities, fuelled by its position as a political and economic hub. The city offers a diverse range of job markets, spanning sectors such as IT, services, trade, and commerce, providing opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour. This places Delhi on par with other major economic centers like Bengaluru, Gurgaon, and Pune, which are also known for strong job markets.

However, Delhi's cost of living is moderate, striking a balance between employment opportunities and expenses. Housing, utilities, and general living costs are more affordable than in cities like Mumbai, where living expenses are significantly higher. At the same time, the cost of living in Delhi is somewhat higher compared to smaller cities like Ahmedabad and Surat, where day-to-day expenses are lower.

Globally, cities like Berlin and Toronto have successfully managed this balance by offering strong job markets while keeping living costs relatively manageable. Delhi could benefit from similar strategies, ensuring that its high employment potential continues to attract talent without disproportionately raising the cost of living.

## 9. Water Security and Waste Management: Addressing Sustainability

Delhi's water security and waste management systems have struggled to keep pace with its rapid urban growth. Water shortages are common, particularly during the summer months, and many residents are forced to rely on private water tankers. Additionally, the city's waste management infrastructure is inadequate, with overflowing landfills and limited recycling capacity contributing to environmental degradation.

To build a sustainable future, Delhi must prioritize water conservation initiatives and improve its waste management systems. While cities like Surat have implemented successful water recycling and waste-to-energy programs, Delhi needs to scale up its efforts in these areas.

Delhi's water security and waste management challenges demand immediate attention. Policymakers should invest in water conservation techniques, such as rainwater harvesting and wastewater recycling, to reduce the city's dependency on external sources. Implementing strict recycling laws and encouraging residents to segregate waste at the source will help reduce landfill waste and improve overall environmental health. Developing waste-to-energy plants that convert waste into renewable energy will not only alleviate the burden on landfills but also contribute to the city's power supply, making waste management a more sustainable practice.

## 10. Technology and Innovation: Moving Toward a Smart City

As technology becomes more integral to urban development, Delhi has the potential to become a "Smart City" that leverages digital innovation for better governance and service delivery. The city has already begun embracing digital platforms, but more needs to be done to scale these initiatives city-wide. Cities like Bengaluru and Pune have been more successful in integrating technology into urban planning, offering smart grids, intelligent traffic management systems, and public Wi-Fi access.

To transform Delhi into a smart city, the government needs to scale up its adoption of digital technologies across public services. Digital governance platforms should streamline access to utilities, healthcare, and education while reducing bureaucratic delays and improving transparency. Public Wi-Fi access should be expanded, especially in underserved areas, to ensure that all residents can participate in the digital economy. Smart infrastructure solutions, such as energy-efficient buildings, smart grids, and real-time monitoring of utilities, will enhance urban resilience, reduce costs, and improve overall efficiency in service delivery, helping Delhi move closer to becoming a technologically advanced city.

## 11. Public Safety and Gender Inclusivity: A City for All

Safety in Delhi is considered moderate, with occasional concerns about crime, particularly in certain areas. Despite law enforcement efforts, the city's vast size and dense population make it difficult to maintain consistently high levels of security. In comparison, cities like Pune and Chandigarh generally perform better in terms of safety. Additionally, public services such as water, electricity, and sanitation in Delhi are functional but face inefficiencies. This mirrors the situation in many other Indian cities but falls short of the higher standards seen in places like Noida and Pune.

Public safety, especially for women, remains a concern in Delhi. While crime rates fluctuate, the large population and urban density present significant challenges for effective policing. In contrast, cities like Pune and Chandigarh have made more progress in improving safety and creating gender-inclusive public spaces.

To enhance safety, Delhi could adopt global best practices in urban planning. Gender-sensitive design should be a priority, with well-lit streets, open public spaces, and comprehensive CCTV surveillance. Cities like Tokyo and Amsterdam have successfully implemented these measures, creating safer environments for all residents. Strengthening community policing programs, similar to those in cities like New York and London, can also help build trust between residents and law enforcement, leading to faster response times and better crime prevention.

By incorporating safety features into urban design and creating public spaces that are inclusive and secure for women, Delhi can move toward becoming a more welcoming and safer city for all its residents.

## 12. Governance and Policy Coordination: Streamlining Decision-Making

The quality of life in Delhi is heavily influenced by governance and public policy decisions. As both a city and a Union Territory, Delhi faces unique challenges due to overlapping authorities between the state and central governments, often leading to delays in decision-making and inefficiencies in policy implementation. These governance issues affect key areas such as air quality, infrastructure, and public services, highlighting the need for a more streamlined and coordinated approach to urban management. Improved coordination between government agencies, better urban planning, and a focus on sustainability could significantly enhance Delhi's quality of life in the years ahead.

The division of power between the central and state governments in Delhi often results in slow policy execution and inefficient management. To address this, policymakers must work to streamline governance by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of these authorities. This would allow for faster, more efficient decision-making, particularly in critical areas like infrastructure and public services.

Adopting global best practices can help improve governance. For instance, cities like Copenhagen and Singapore have successfully implemented integrated urban management systems where different government agencies work in harmony to tackle urban challenges. Delhi could benefit from similar approaches by encouraging greater collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to ensure more effective urban development.

Creating platforms for civic engagement is also essential, giving residents a voice in the planning and implementation of policies. Cities like Barcelona have pioneered models of participatory governance,

where citizens actively contribute to urban planning decisions. By incorporating these global practices, Delhi can better align its development with the needs and aspirations of its diverse population, paving the way for a more efficient and responsive governance model.

## **Conclusion: The Path Forward for Delhi**

Delhi stands at a pivotal moment in its urban transformation, with both significant achievements and persistent challenges shaping its future. As the capital of India, the city embodies the nation's political, economic, and cultural heart, but its continued growth will depend on its ability to address key urban issues while adopting best practices from cities around the globe.

To truly become a world-class city, Delhi must focus on inclusive economic growth, ensuring that income inequality is addressed through targeted policies that empower lower- and middle-income groups. Investing in a multi-modal public transport system, inspired by cities like Tokyo and Copenhagen, will help ease traffic congestion and improve urban mobility. At the same time, combating air pollution and enhancing sustainability will be crucial to improving the city's livability. Lessons from cities like Oslo and Singapore on reducing emissions and expanding green spaces offer a path forward.

Affordable housing, better healthcare, and stronger social safety nets are essential to building a more equitable city. Adopting public-private partnerships for affordable housing, expanding healthcare infrastructure, and strengthening protections for informal workers will help bridge the socio-economic divide. In parallel, the city must continue to leverage its technological potential to become a smart city, enhancing governance and service delivery through digital innovation.

Finally, Delhi's governance must evolve to allow for more streamlined, efficient decision-making. By learning from cities like Copenhagen and Singapore, where integrated urban management systems work effectively, Delhi can foster greater coordination between its central and state governments, enabling faster, more responsive policy implementation.

By addressing these areas with strategic foresight and a commitment to inclusivity and sustainability, Delhi can transform itself into a more equitable, sustainable, and globally competitive city—one that sets a benchmark for urban excellence, not just in India, but around the world.

## Annexture 1: Quality of Life Index

The comparison of quality-of-life indicators for various Indian cities is based on general observations from multiple reports and surveys that assess urban development and livability in India. The terms **Low**, **Moderate**, and **High** in the context of quality of life are qualitative indicators used to provide a general sense of how well a city performs in specific areas like healthcare, education, infrastructure, air quality, and more. Here's how each term is defined in relation to common urban performance indicators:

### 1. Healthcare

- **Low:** Poor access to healthcare services, limited hospital infrastructure, long waiting times, and insufficient coverage of public health facilities.
- **Moderate:** Reasonable access to healthcare, with decent infrastructure, though some gaps in coverage, especially in public healthcare.
- **High:** Excellent access to healthcare services, with a well-developed network of public and private hospitals, availability of specialized care, and shorter wait times.

### 2. Education

- **Low:** Lack of access to quality education, poor public education infrastructure, and limited opportunities for higher education.
- **Moderate:** Adequate access to education, with a reasonable number of schools and universities but room for improvement in quality or coverage.
- **High:** Excellent access to quality education with a strong public and private education system, including higher education institutions and vocational training.

### 3. Public Transport and Infrastructure

- **Low:** Poor public transport options, bad road conditions, frequent traffic jams, and lack of integrated transportation networks (buses, metro, etc.).
- **Moderate:** Adequate infrastructure, with functioning public transport systems (e.g., metro, buses), but issues like traffic congestion or gaps in coverage.
- **High:** Well-developed and integrated public transport systems, efficient traffic management, and modern infrastructure (roads, metro, etc.).

### 4. Air Quality and Environment

- **Low:** Consistently poor air quality, high pollution levels, and environmental degradation (e.g., lack of green spaces, water pollution).
- **Moderate:** Manageable air quality, occasional pollution issues, but with government interventions to improve environmental conditions.
- **High:** Clean air, well-maintained environmental standards, with a focus on sustainability, green spaces, and minimal pollution.

### 5. Employment Opportunities



- **Low:** Limited job opportunities, high unemployment rates, and low wages, with few industries providing growth or stable employment.
- **Moderate:** Adequate employment opportunities with various sectors offering jobs, though with some constraints in job diversity or salary levels.
- **High:** Robust job market with multiple sectors (e.g., IT, manufacturing, services) offering high-paying and varied employment opportunities, low unemployment rates.

## 6. Cost of Living

- **Low:** Very high cost of living relative to average income, making it difficult for middle- and lower-income groups to maintain a decent standard of living (e.g., expensive housing, high utilities).
- **Moderate:** Reasonable cost of living with affordable housing and everyday expenses manageable for most income groups.
- **High:** Low cost of living relative to income, where housing, utilities, and essential services are affordable for a wide range of income groups.

## 7. Safety

- **Low:** High crime rates, poor law enforcement, and frequent incidents of violence or theft, contributing to an unsafe living environment.
- **Moderate:** Reasonable safety levels, with law enforcement in place but occasional safety concerns, such as petty crime or localized incidents.
- **High:** Low crime rates, strong law enforcement, and a general sense of security and safety in public spaces and residential areas.

## 8. Public Services

- **Low:** Poor delivery of essential public services (water, electricity, sanitation), frequent service disruptions, and inadequate urban management.
- **Moderate:** Adequate public services with occasional issues, but overall, residents can access necessary services with manageable disruptions.
- **High:** Excellent public service delivery with reliable access to utilities like water, electricity, waste management, and sanitation, with minimal disruptions.

## Summary

The categorization of **Low, Moderate, and High** is based on the overall quality, availability, and accessibility of these services or conditions in a city, reflecting the level of urban development and governance. These labels are relative, comparing cities to each other, and are drawn from urban surveys, reports, and general observations from various data sources.



## About PRICE

[www.price360.in](http://www.price360.in)

- People Research on India’s Consumer Economy (*PRICE branded as ICE 360°*) established in 2012 as an independent, *not-for-profit*, ‘fact tank’ and ‘think tank’ registered U/S 8 Companies Act. The vision of PRICE is to be the premier research institute offering unparalleled insights into India’s household economy. Its mission includes conducting high-quality research, providing data-driven insights, and fostering a deeper understanding of India’s economic landscape. The institute conducts large-scale surveys to gather data on household well-being, which it then analyzes to identify trends and develop policy recommendations. As an independent organization, PRICE is committed to producing unbiased and objective analysis, contributing to the socio-economic development of India.
- Largely supported by grants and contract research, PRICE’s strengths lie in its access to comprehensive data sets, experienced team of researchers, and strong collaborations with academic institutions, government bodies, and industry players.

## About PRICE’s ICE 360°

PRICE’s ICE 360° surveys called as **“Household Survey of India’s Consumer Economy and Consumer Environment”** aimed to generate integrated longitudinal data (Interconnected, consistent and up to date) to provide a 360° view of “household’s & people’s” progress on financial conditions (income, expenditure, saving and borrowings), living conditions, access to public goods, amenities, state welfare, health, education, occupational conditions, social and occupational mobility and inclusion in the household economy.

In recent times, it has been the only regular source of data on income, expenditure and saving in India. And among household surveys of its kind across the world, ICE 360° surveys hold a unique position on account of scientific and robust measurement of income, its massive sample size, range, and the depth of information it uncovers. Over the years, the survey has become the most credible source of information on Indian consumer market structures for decision makers in top marketing concerns, in public enterprises and Indian household economy in government.

These surveys (2014, 2016, 2021 and 2023) are mammoth and complex exercise, for instance, the Wave 2.0 covered about 300,000+ households through a household listing exercise, followed by a more detailed survey of 61,000 households - 25,000 in rural India and 36,000 in urban India deploying probability sample design. Geographically, the sample has been drawn from across 216 districts, 1217 villages and 487 towns spread across 25 major states.

### PRICE’s ICE 360° survey - Features

Feature	ICE 360° survey (2014)	ICE 360° survey (2016)	ICE 360° survey (2021)	ICE 360° survey (2023)
Survey type	Best mix of Baseline-Panel-Longitudinal -Cross-sectional			
Sample design	<b>Probability Sample:</b> Three stage stratified random sample design			
Coverage	21 states & UTs (Rural &Urban)	25 states & UTs (Rural &Urban)	23 states & UTs (Rural &Urban);	25 states & UTs (Rural &Urban)
Sampling frame	100,000 households	300,000 households	200,000 households	200,000 households
Sample size	20,000 households	61,000 households	40,000 households	43,000 households
Data collection	Face-to-face interview		Face-to-face interview - CAPI	
Respondents	Chief Wage Earner (CWE)/Head, Housewife and other earning members of households			
Reference period	Financial Year - 2014	Financial Year - 2016	Financial year - 2021	Financial year - 2023

The findings in the form of actionable insights, presentations, and reports including the household level data are shared with various stakeholders ranging from policymakers in government, policy advisors, business strategists, media, academic & research institutions including national and international individual researchers.

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