



WOMEN'S URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT – GS III MAINS

Q. The Proposed Women Urban Employment Guarantee Act not only reduces gender gaps, but also addresses societal norms and challenges by increasing women's empowerment. Examine (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *A women's urban employment guarantee act*

What's in the news?

- Reducing gender gaps and increasing women's empowerment are part of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Notwithstanding ethical and constitutional imperatives, there is also evidence suggesting that increasing women's employment rates can be an engine for economic growth.

Causes for Urban Unemployment Among Women in India

1. Social Norms and Safety Concerns:

- Social norms, lack of safety and hostile transportation options are some of the factors inhibiting urban women to enter the workforce.

2. Gender Segregation of Occupation:

- From the demand side perspective, it is explained by the fact that gender segregation of occupation and sector exists in India and lack of growth in the demand for labour in sectors dominated by women have resulted in low participation.

3. Economic Factors:

- The rapid emergence and adoption of new technologies as a response to the pandemic caused high unemployment due to business failures and the loss of jobs.
- As a result, the skill gap between job seekers with traditional credentials kept widening.

4. Population Growth:

- Increase in population and labour force is the cause of rising unemployment in India.
- That's why India's economic growth can't keep up with the increased population.

5. Lack of Adequate Investment:

- Experts and campaigners feel that a lack of adequate investment in the unorganised, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), and rural development sectors, combined with safety concerns and regressive social norms, is keeping women underemployed or unemployed.



6. High Cost:

- It is important to note that assuming 150 days of work per year at ₹500 as daily wages, the wage component, to be funded by the Union government, would then cost around 1.5% of the GDP.
- Adding material and administrative costs to this is likely to make it around 2%.

Proposed Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA)

- The Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA) is a proposed legislation aimed at addressing urban unemployment specifically for women.
- It purposely guarantees employment opportunities specifically for urban women.

Objective:

- WUEGA will aim to bridge the gap in employment opportunities between men and women in cities.
- By providing a safety net and income security, WUEGA will seek to empower women and encourage their participation in the urban workforce.

Possible Features:

1. Guaranteed Employment:

- WUEGA proposes guaranteeing women a minimum number of workdays (e.g., 150 days) per year.

2. Local Work:

- Creating work opportunities within a reasonable distance (e.g., 5 km) from a woman's residence.

3. Accessible Infrastructure:

- WUEGA might include provisions for essential facilities like childcare centres at worksites to address challenges faced by working mothers.

4. Skill Development:

- The proposal might incorporate training programs to bridge any skill gaps between available jobs and the qualifications of women in the applicant pool.

5. Women-Led Management:

- It proposes that women should form a significant percentage of the WUEGA management staff; at least 50% (ideally 100%) of the program management staff under WUEGA.

6. Supportive Measures:

- Incentives such as automatic inclusion in welfare boards can be created; these could act as agencies to provide maternity entitlements, pensions, and serve as resources for emergency funds.



Potential Challenges in Enacting the Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA):

1. Financial Burden:

- Providing guaranteed employment translates to significant costs for wages, infrastructure development (e.g., childcare facilities at worksites), and program administration.
- Assuming 150 days of work per year at ₹500 as daily wages, the wage component, to be funded by the Union government, would cost around 1.5% of the GDP.

2. Job Creation in Locality:

- Creating enough diverse work opportunities within a reasonable distance (e.g., 5 km) from a woman's residence, especially in densely populated cities, could be challenging.
- The program will need to consider local needs and infrastructure to design suitable work options.

3. Safety Concerns:

- Safety remains a significant concern for women in urban settings, particularly during commutes to and from work.
- Fear of harassment or violence in public spaces may discourage women from seeking employment opportunities, thus limiting their participation in the workforce.
- The rate of crimes against women per lakh population stood at 66.4 while the charge sheeting in such cases was logged at 75.8, according to the data in "Crime in India 2022", the annual crime report of the NCRB.

4. Skill Gaps:

- Many urban women may lack the necessary skills and experience required for formal employment opportunities.
- Access to quality education and vocational training programs may be limited, leading to disparities in skill levels and hindering women's employability.

5. Capacity Building:

- Ensuring at least 50% women in program management at all levels could be difficult initially.
- Focused capacity-building initiatives might be required to create a robust female workforce for managing the program.

6. Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers:

- Efficient program implementation requires a streamlined bureaucracy to handle registration, job allocation, grievance redressal, and monitoring.
- There may be opposition from individuals or groups who are resistant to change and advocate for maintaining the status quo, which could impede the passage of legislation aimed at enhancing women's employment rights.



7. Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes:

- Deep-rooted societal expectations may hinder acceptance of women's increased participation in the workforce, especially in urban areas where traditional gender roles are more pronounced.
- Prevailing stereotypes regarding women's roles as caregivers or homemakers could pose resistance to their engagement in formal employment.

WAY FORWARD:

- A **detailed list of possible urban works** such as plantation and harvesting reeds on floating wetlands already exist; these should be supplemented based on local needs and wider consultation.
- **Incentives** such as automatic inclusion in welfare boards can be created; these could act as agencies to provide maternity entitlements, pensions, and serve as resources for emergency funds.
- **Reducing gender gaps and increasing women's empowerment** are part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Notwithstanding ethical and constitutional imperatives, there is also evidence suggesting that increasing women's employment rates can be an engine for economic growth.
- It is also important to **address the societal norms and challenges** that inhibit women from participating in the workforce.
- Additionally, more initiatives and policies aimed at encouraging women's participation in the workforce can help in further improving the female LFPR in India.



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