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ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**A Women's Urban  
Employment Guarantee Act**

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## A WOMEN'S URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

### Context

- Recently, the urban employment landscape in India for women has been a topic of concern these days, and it is found that there is a high unmet demand for employment among urban women.

### About

- The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** indicates that there has been an increase in women's workforce participation from 22% in 2017-18 to 35.9% in 2022-23.
  - ◆ However, this rate is still lower than the global average of 47% and significantly lower than some other countries like China, which has a female LFPR of 60%.
- Despite the increase, the **female LFPR in India is still low.**
  - ◆ **In Rural Areas:** FLFPR has increased to 41.5% in 2022-23 from 24.6% in 2017-18;
  - ◆ **In Urban Areas:** FLFPR has increased to 25.4% in 2022-23 from 20.4% in 2017-18, and it pegs women's employment rate in urban areas at 22.9% in the last quarter of 2023.

### Current Scenario (Unmet Demand):

- There are clear signs of high unmet demand for employment among urban women. A much larger share of unemployed women in urban areas are seeking employment compared to rural areas.
  - ◆ The **unemployment rate** (a measure of how many would like employment irrespective of whether they are actively seeking it or not) in **urban areas is 9%** compared to **4% in rural areas.**
  - ◆ There are **two types of unemployment**, like individuals who would like to work and are actively seeking a job; and those who would like to work but may not be actively seeking a job.
- **Wastage of Potential:** Nearly **25% of urban women** have completed higher secondary education compared to **5% in rural areas.**
  - ◆ The **low urban employment rates** among women points to wastage of much potential.
- **MGNREGA and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM):** These initiatives have been pivotal in providing financial autonomy to **women in rural areas.**
  - ◆ More than half the MGNREGA workforce are women.
- However, **urban realities are different.** Social norms, lack of safety, and hostile transportation options are some of the factors inhibiting urban women to enter the workforce.

### Causes and Reasons for Urban Unemployment Among Women in India

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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%.**

### Possible Solution Proposed

- The government has also introduced various protective provisions in the labour laws for equal opportunity and a congenial work environment for women workers.
- **The Need for WUEGA:** To address overall urban unemployment, **some States have an urban employment programme**, while these are **not restricted only to women**.
  - ♦ There is a need for the **WUEGA** and **Decentralised Urban Employment and Training Scheme** at a national level, as MGNREGA for rural women.

### Vision for WUEGA:

- It envisioned a WUEGA where women form **at least 50% (ideally 100%)** of the programme management staff.
- Involving **women and local communities** can also potentially strengthen the constitutional mandate of decentralisation.
- Each worksite would have **essential worksite facilities** including childcare facilities. Work must be available within a 5-km radius and public transportation must be free for women.

### Major Urban Employment Programmes

- Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (AUEGS), Tripura's Urban Employment Programme (TUEP), and West Bengal's Urban Employment Scheme were early initiatives in urban employment programmes.
- **Women-led initiatives in Karnataka:** Women handle end-to-end waste management in gram panchayats of selected districts including collection and driving of the 'Swacch' vehicles.
  - ♦ Not only has the initiative been a success, it has also enabled several women to acquire driving licences.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY):** Launched as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat package 3.0, this scheme incentivizes employers for creation of new employment along with social security benefits and restoration of loss of employment during Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY):** Launched to incentivise employers for creation of new employment.
- **National Career Service (NCS) Project:** This project provides a variety of career-related services like job matching, career counselling, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, apprenticeship, internships etc.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (PMGKRA):** This scheme was launched to provide immediate employment & livelihood opportunities to the distressed, to saturate the villages with public infrastructure and creation of livelihood assets.
- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM):** This scheme aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities.
- **PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi):** This scheme was launched to facilitate collateral-free working capital loans up to ₹10,000 of 1-year tenure, to approximately 50 lakh street vendors, to resume their businesses post Covid-19 lockdown.

### Conclusion and 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.

### DAILY MAINS QUESTION

What are the reasons and challenges that contribute to the urban unemployment landscape for women in India? Give suggestions that could be implemented to overcome these challenges?

Source: *TH*

