



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyze the importance and potential challenges associated with implementing the proposed Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act in India. Recommend strategies for realizing substantial economic empowerment for women across the nation. (250 words)

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Approach

- Give a brief introduction to the proposed Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act in India.
- Analyze the importance and potential challenges associated with implementing the proposed Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act in India.
- Recommend strategies for realizing substantial economic empowerment for women across the nation.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA) is a proposed legislation aimed at addressing urban unemployment specifically for women. WUEGA proposes **guaranteeing women a minimum number of workdays (e.g., 150 days)** per year.

Body

The necessity for the Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA) :

- **Gender Disparities in Urban Employment:** Urban areas often witness gender-based disparities in employment opportunities.
 - According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**, only **22.9%** of urban women were employed in the last quarter of **2023**.
- **Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development Goals:** WUEGA would empower urban women by providing them with guaranteed employment opportunities.
 - Promoting women's employment is crucial for achieving sustainable development goals, including gender equality and economic empowerment.
- **Childcare and Supportive Infrastructure:** WUEGA emphasizes the need for childcare facilities at worksites. These provisions enable women to participate in employment without compromising their caregiving responsibilities.
- **Drawing lessons from Successful Rural Employment Schemes:** Drawing lessons from successful rural employment schemes like the MGNREGA, the WUEGA can replicate similar models tailored for urban contexts.
 - By leveraging existing frameworks and experiences, the WUEGA can build upon proven strategies for enhancing women's participation in the workforce.
- **Potential for Economic Growth and Development:** Increasing women's employment rates can serve as a catalyst for economic growth by expanding the labor force and stimulating productivity.
 - The WUEGA has the potential to contribute to broader economic development goals by harnessing the talents and capabilities of urban women.

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

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- **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**.
- **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.
- **Safety Concerns:** 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.
- **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.
- **Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers:** 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.
- **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.

The Way Forward for Effective Enactment of WUEGA:

- **Collecting Gender-Disaggregated Data:** Gender-disaggregated data provides policymakers with valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by urban women in accessing and retaining employment.
 - The collected data should note trends regarding choice of jobs, usual times of the year when women access these jobs, education levels of women opting for the scheme, and so on.
- **Designing an Urban Employment Scheme with a Gender Lens:** Draft the Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA) as all-encompassing legislation, delineating the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of both the government and recipients, grounded in gender-disaggregated data.
 - The legislation should mandate equal pay for equal work, ensuring that women receive the same wages as their male counterparts for similar job roles and responsibilities.
- **Allocate Resource and Build Capacity:** Allocate adequate financial resources for the implementation of WUEGA, ensuring sufficient funding for wages, administrative expenses, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives.
 - Provide training and capacity-building programs for government officials, program administrators, and beneficiaries to ensure effective implementation and management of the WUEGA.
- **A Phased Approach to Implementation:** Initiate pilot programs in select urban areas to test the feasibility of implementing WUEGA. Conduct feasibility studies to assess the readiness of different urban areas and identify potential challenges and opportunities.
 - Begin implementation of WUEGA in a phased manner, starting with urban areas where infrastructure and support systems are relatively well-developed and expanding gradually to other areas.
- **Address Safety Concerns:** Implement measures to enhance the safety and security of women in public spaces, including adequate lighting, surveillance systems, and increased police patrolling, to mitigate safety concerns and encourage greater workforce participation.
- **Raise Awareness and Change Attitudes:** Conduct awareness campaigns and sensitization programs to challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender equality, and change societal attitudes toward women's roles and capabilities in the workforce.

Conclusion

The Constitution of India upholds principles of equality and social justice, requiring affirmative action to tackle gender disparities in employment. Implementing the WUEGA is in line with these constitutional mandates and ethical obligations to promote gender equality and empowerment.

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