



## Agnipath Scheme

For Prelims: Compensation to Agniveer, [Agnipath scheme](#), [Seva Nidhi](#), [Three services](#) ([Army](#), [Navy](#) and [Airforce](#)), Armed Forces Battle Casualty Fund.

**For Mains:** Significance, Criticisms of Agnipath Scheme, Government Policies & Interventions

[Source: IE](#)

### Why in News?

The ruling-party government's ambitious [Agnipath scheme](#), announced in June 2022, has been facing opposition from various political parties and Armed Forces veterans.

- Ongoing concerns highlight the scheme's impact on military recruitment and the welfare of soldiers.

### What is Agnipath Scheme?

#### ▪ About:

- The term "**Agniveer**" translates to "Fire-Warriors" and is a **new military rank**.
- It is a scheme of **recruiting army personnel below officer ranks** such as **soldiers, airmen, and sailors** who are not commissioned officers to the **Indian Armed Forces**.
- They are recruited for a period of **4 years**, after which, **upto 25%** of these recruits (called Agniveers), can join the services on a **permanent commission** (another 15 years), subject to merit and organisational requirements.
- At present, **all sailors, airmen, and soldiers**, except the technical cadre of the medical branch, are recruited to the services under this scheme.

#### ▪ Eligibility Criteria:

- Candidates between the age of **17.5 years to 23 years** are eligible to apply (the upper age limit was increased from 21).
- **Girls under the given age limit are open for the agnipath entry**, while there is no such reservation for women under this scheme.

#### ▪ Pay & Benefits:

- **Death on Duty:** The family gets a combined sum of **Rs 1 crore**, which includes both the **Seva Nidhi package** and the soldier's unserved salary.
- **Disability:** An Agniveer can receive compensation up to **Rs 44 lakh** depending on the severity of the disability. This amount is provided **only if the disability is caused** by or worsened due to military service.
- **Pensions:** Agniveers won't receive a regular pension after their 4-year service, unlike soldiers in the traditional system.
  - **Only the 25%** who get selected for permanent commission will be eligible for a pension.

#### ▪ Goal of Agnipath:

- This scheme is designed to **keep the armed forces young** and **bring down the number of permanent soldiers in the military**, leading to a significant reduction in the government's pension spending on defense forces.

## Why was the Agnipath Scheme Introduced?

- **Younger, Fitter Force:** The government believes Agnipath will create a **more agile fighting force** due to the emphasis on younger recruits, translating to faster response times and better adaptation on the battlefield.
  - The average age in the Armed Forces, currently **32 years**, will be reduced to **26 years** with Agnipath's implementation.
- **Reduce Pension Bill:** It also aims to **lessen the burden of the ever-growing defense pension bill**. The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence report** in 2022 projected the Indian Armed Forces' pension bill to reach a staggering **Rs 2.5 lakh crore** by 2025.
  - Agnipath, with **its shorter service** duration for most recruits, could potentially help manage this expenditure.
- **Technological Integration:** The scheme aims to **leverage the tech-savviness of younger recruits** to better integrate emerging technologies into the Armed Forces.
- **Skilled Workforce for Civilian Sector:** The government envisions Agniveers transitioning to the civilian workforce with **valuable skills and discipline gained during their service**.
  - This could potentially contribute to a more skilled national workforce and economic growth.
- **More Employment Opportunities:** It will increase employment opportunities and because of the skills and experience **acquired during the four-year service such soldiers** will get employment in various fields.

## Similar Programmes in Other Nations

- **Voluntary Tour of Duty:** Depending on the requirements of the military and the branch of service, **tours of voluntary duty in the US** can last anywhere from 6 to 9 months to a full year.
- **Required Military Service (Conscription):** **Israel, Norway, North Korea, Singapore** and **Sweden** are among the nations that use this practice.

## What are the Issues Associated with Agnipath Scheme?

- **Lack of Retirement Benefits:** The scheme provides a one-time payment of **Rs 11.71 lakh** on completion of 4-year tenure, **but no gratuity or pension**.
  - This has caused **widespread discontent among aspirants** who were seeking job security and pension benefits.
- **Short Service Duration:** The **4-year term is seen as inadequate**, with concerns that recruits may **lack the same motivation and training as permanent soldiers**.
  - Also, this duration is **insufficient to train and skill soldiers in the long term** as it may lead to **skill and experience deficit** in armed forces.
- **Age Limit Issues:** The current upper age limit of **23 years** has **excluded many youth** who could not apply due to lack of recruitment during the pandemic.
- **Unemployment Concerns:** With **limited permanent absorption (only 25%)**, the scheme is seen as **exacerbating the already high youth unemployment** in the country.
  - This comes amidst wider economic challenges like rising inflation and inequalities.
- **Perceived Political Motives:** Experts believe the **scheme was rushed through without adequate consultation**, possibly as a political move ahead of elections. The lack of endorsement from defense forces also raises doubts.
- **Pension Bill Reduction:** The scheme is seen as a way for the government to reduce its rising defense pension expenditure, **prioritizing financial savings over long-term force building**.

## Way Forward

- **Raising the Age Limit and Permanent Retention Quota:** There should be a longer **service period to 7-8 years for Agniveers.**
  - Also, the **entry age for technical roles should be increased to 23 years**, and **regular service retention rate** for Agniveers should be increased from current 25% to 60-70%.
- **Enhanced Entitlements and Benefits:** Agniveers should be **provided with a contributory pension scheme, generous gratuity, and ex-gratia** for disability during training.
  - They should be offered **opportunities in other security forces, veteran status**, and preference for government jobs, with a **transparent, merit-based system** for retaining Agniveers.
- **Implement Robust Skilling and Resettlement Programs:** A **comprehensive skilling and resettlement programs** should be developed **in collaboration with the private sector** and government agencies to facilitate a smooth transition for Agniveers into civilian life.
  - A legislation should **also be made that mandates the compulsory absorption** of Agniveers by private employers and corporations.
- **Raising Educational Standards:** The educational **requirements for Agniveers to should be raised from 10 to 10+2** and a more rigorous national entrance exam should be implemented.

## Conclusion

The Agnipath scheme in India is a major reform in defense policy that **changes the recruitment process for armed forces**. Initial implementation shows positive signs in the motivation, intelligence, and physical standards of Agniveers recruited under the scheme. Human element is **deemed more important than technological advancements in military** operations, highlighting the need for character development and psychological well-being of Agniveers to align with unit pride and cohesion.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Discuss the significance and challenges of the Agniveer Scheme introduced by the Indian government for recruitment in the armed forces. What measures can ensure its success?

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims**

**Q. Department of Border Management is a Department of which one of the following Union Ministries? (2008)**

- (a) Ministry of Defence
- (b) Ministry of Home Affairs
- (c) Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways
- (d) Ministry of Environment and Forests

**Ans: (b)**

### **Mains**

**Q1:** Analyse the multidimensional challenges posed by external state and non-state actors, to the internal security of India. Also discuss measures required to be taken to combat these threats. **(2021)**

