



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)**

