Creche Facilities in India

Why in news?

Despite the significant role the crèches play in regulating women's mobility within the economy, inadequate funding and poor compliance with rules are plaguing the childcare infrastructure.

How the crèche scheme evolved in India?

- A crèche is a facility which enables parents to leave their children while they are at work and where children are provided stimulating environment for their holistic development.
- **RGNCS-** The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme (RGNCS) was launched in 2006 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide affordable childcare facilities to working mothers.
- **National Crèche Scheme (NCS)-** From 2017, RGNCS is being implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide day care facilities to children of working mothers.



- **Mission Shakti-** In 2022, National Creche Scheme (NCS) was revised and subsumed as part of the '*Palna' scheme under Mission Shakti.*
- **Aim-** To provide day-care facilities for children (6 months to 6 years) of working mothers and to improve nutrition and health status of children.
- The NCS falls under the umbrella of *Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS*) under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- It provides support to women of low-income groups who go to work *at least 15 days a month, or 6 months a year*.
- **Availability-** 7.5 hours a day, 26 days a month
- **Fee-** The subsidised facilities charge
    - Rs 20, a month per child for families below the poverty line
    - Between Rs 100-200 for other families.
- **Function-** Each crèche is required to provide
    - Holistic development of children
    - A space tasked with providing quality nutrition, sleep, education and stimulation activities.
    - A creche of 25 children should at least have one creche worker, helper and doctor.
- **Funding-**
    - 60% from Union Government,
    - 30% from State Government

    - 10% from individual NGOs.
- **Role of State Governments**- They were made responsible for making, enforcing and monitoring the relevant rules.

Women workforce and crèche facilities
• **MGNREGA scheme**-Data shows more than 50% of the workforce are women under this scheme. • Most of them are young and single mothers who have to take care of their children. • **2018 survey-** It revealed that work opportunities provided under the NREGA were made less attractive because of the absence/insufficiencies of childcare at worksites. • **Independent studies**- It found a correlation between the presence of childcare facilities and women's employment. • If childcare services were made available, almost 90% of women showed interest in working.

What are the laws that govern childcare facilities?

- **MGNREGA**- It is the *only Act* in the country that legalises support for childcare in the unorganised sector, by including the provision for crèches.
- It recognises both the work-related rights of women, as well as their right to provide adequate nutrition and care for their infants.
- **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017 -** It was enacted to include provisions for crèche facilities at the place of work in every establishment with 50 or more employees.
- **Rules for crèche facility-**
    - **Eligibility-** To all employees including temporary, daily wage, consultant and contractual personnel,
    - **Timing-** The facility should operate on an 8 to 10-hour shift.
    - **Visits**- It also entitles women to 4 visits a day and intervals for rest.
- **New Labour Code on Social Security**- It requires the governments, NGOs or private entities to provide crèche facility located within the establishment or at an easily accessible distance for employees including a woman working from home.
- **The Factories Act of 1948-** Employers of factories with more than 30 women workers shall maintain a suitable room for the use of children under the age of 6 years.
- **The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996-** It requires a facility if 50 female building workers are employed in a construction site.
- **Shops Establishment Acts**- States like Maharashtra and Gujarat have identified crèche-related provisions in their respective Shops and Establishment Acts.

What are the issues faced by India's crèche system?

- **Non-Functioning**- Between 2015 and 2020, more than 72% of functioning crèches have shut down, per government data.
- **Fund deficit**- Insufficient and delayed allocation of funds has remained a key hindrance to the scheme's functioning.
    - Revised budget estimates for NCS were brought down to Rs. 65 crore from Rs.200 crore.

- **Lack of utilisation**- Only a small proportion of the allocated budget was utilised.
    - Out of the revised budget allocation of Rs 4 crore, no money was spent in FY 2022.
- **Intense lockdown**- The crèches were closed during the COVID-19 lockdown and hence no funds were allocated during 2021-22.
- **Poor compliance**- 2018 report found that 75% of the employers in the formal sector interviewed said that there are no crèche facilities provided in their establishments.
- **Lack of data**- There is no centralised data maintained by the firms employing more than 50 employees and crèche establishment centres.
- **Unavailability**- In a survey of 300 women it found that they made a negligible use of childcare facilities due to lack of availability.
- **Lack of awareness**- The 2018 study, looked at creche facilities in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, found that 53% of women in Udaipur were aware of the provision of crèche facilities.
- **Operational challenges-**
    - Inadequate staffing in some day-care centres.
    - Infrastructure deficit to manage young children who need a special diet or close supervision.
    - Incompatible working times of women in varied sectors
    - Space constraints
- **Familial acceptance**- Women were told they would be responsible "if anything happens to the child," which discouraged them from using these facilities.
- **Eligibility criteria**- They are not universal, leading to the exclusion of several women workers such as home-based workers, vendors, domestic workers, self-employed etc.,

How do childcare impact working women?

- **Triple burden**- Women face a 'triple burden' of house chores, paid labour and child care.
- **India's Time Use Survey Analysis**- It showed that the working women between 15 to 60 years old spend twice the amount on unpaid domestic work like caregiving, cleaning, cooking.
- **Motherhood** - World Bank report found that the urban women with children less than 6 years of age had lower participation in the workforce.
- **Drop out from workforce**- The pandemic, and subsequent closure of schools and day care centres caused further dropping out from the labour force.
- **Informal sector-** 'Motherhood penalty' plays out differently, where women make concessions by taking up flexible, low-paying work or being self-employed.
- **Value to women work-** A global review of policies in low- and middle-income countries found that welfare schemes sees women as more than 'mothers' and assigns value to 'women's work'.

What lies ahead?

- There is a need to go beyond recognising and reducing unpaid care work for women to redistribute the gendered burden of children.
- Accessible and affordable creche facilities can reap a *"triple dividend"* where

- Women’s work and mobility are encouraged
- Women are integrated into the economy
- Maternal and child health is simultaneously looked after

References

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