Spousal Open Work Permits (SOWP) in Canada

Why in News?

Canada's Spousal Open Work Permit policy has been updated, allowing spouses of international students to apply for work permits while studying.

- SOWP program provide opportunities for their ***spouses*** to apply for an open work permit.
- Thus, spouses have the opportunity to ***work full-time*** for the duration of their partner's study in Canada.
- Students who meet the eligibility criteria set by *Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)* can apply for a spousal visa.
- **Eligible academic programs**
  - PhD programs
  - Master's degree programs (with a minimum duration of 16 months) and
  - professional courses like Doctor of Dental Surgery,
  - Bachelor of Law (LLB),
  - Pharmacy (B. Pharmacy, PharmD),
  - Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM),
  - Doctor of Medicine (MD),
  - Bachelor of Nursing (BN),
  - Bachelor of Engineering (BEng),
  - Doctor of Optometry (OD),
  - BSE Pharmacy,
  - Bachelor of Education (BEd).
- **Recent Changes -** International students can now apply for a SOWP alongside their study permit application.
- If the student is already studying in Canada, their spouse can apply for an open work permit if their spouse is still in their home country.
- If the duration of the work permit is set to expire before the study period, they can apply for an extension to match the remaining duration of the study period.
- Once a student completes their studies in Canada, they may be eligible to apply for a Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP), which allows graduates to work in Canada for ***up to 3 years,*** depending on the length of their program.
- In such cases, the spouse may also be eligible for an open work permit under specific conditions.
- The spouse's eligibility depends on whether the student on PGWP is employed in certain sectors under Canada's Training, Education, Experience, and Responsibilities (TEER) system.
- Specifically TEER 0 or 1 occupations and in TEER 2 or 3 occupations sectors they should choose jobs with labour shortages or those linked to government priorities.
- E.g., Natural sciences, healthcare, construction, education, etc.
- For students who are not eligible under these specific programs, their spouse has a few other options.
- The spouse can apply separately for a study permit or a visitor visa and they need to show strong financial proof to prove they can meet the living expenses in Canada.

Reference

[The Indian Express | Spousal Open Work Permits (SOWP)]

