

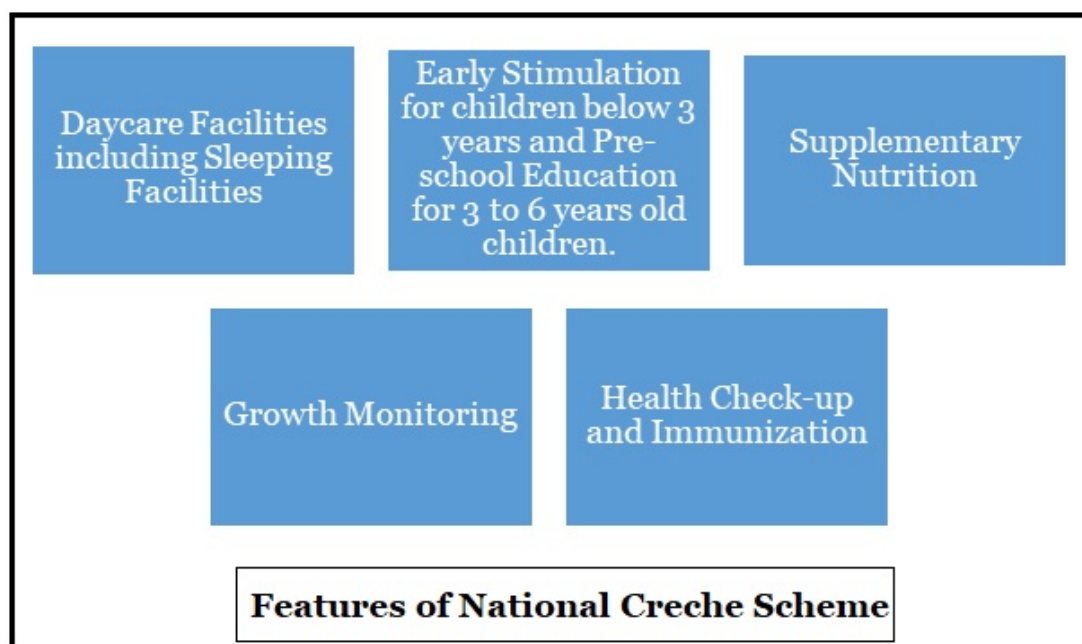
## Creche Facilities in India

### 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 Crèche 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

1. [The Hindu- India's crèche scheme and laws](#)
2. [NIC- National crèche scheme](#)
3. [PIB- Features of National crèche scheme](#)

