



LABOURS AND CLIMATE CHANGE - GS III MAINS

Q. How can the increasing temperatures of our planet affect the availability, demand, and conditions of labour across different sectors and regions? (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Analysing labour on a warming planet*

What's in the news?

- The International Labour Organization's (ILO) has recently released a report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate'.

Key takeaways:

- The report highlights the need to ensure that labor becomes climate-proofed and to address the evolving work environment due to global warming.

Six Key Impacts of Climate Change on Workers Identified by the ILO:

1. Excessive heat
2. Solar ultraviolet radiation
3. Extreme weather events
4. Workplace air pollution
5. Vector-borne diseases
6. Agrochemicals

Sectors Affected by Heat Hazards:

1. Agriculture Sector:

- Globally, the informal farm labor sector is the most vulnerable to heat, especially in developing countries, where workers often lack adequate weather protection.

2. MSME Sector:

- In India, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector employs about 21% of the total workforce, lacks proper oversight from State Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) departments due to its higher level of informalization.

3. Construction Sector:

- It employs 12% of India's workforce. Construction workers deal with the urban heat island effect because construction is mostly concentrated in cities, where temperatures tend to be higher due to urbanization.
- Workers endure risks like physical injuries and health issues such as asthma due to air pollution, especially in highly polluted Indian cities.

4. Gig Workers:



- Gig workers constitute around 1.5% of India's total workforce, expected to rise to about 4.5% by 2030 according to Nasscom.

Laws to Protect Worker Rights:

1. Central Laws:

- The Factories Act, the Workmen Compensation Act, and the Building and Other Construction Workers Act are central to ensuring workplace safety in India.
- These laws address various aspects of labor rights and well-being, including factory conditions and compensation for work-related injuries.

2. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code, 2020):

- Introduced in 2020, the OSH Code represents a comprehensive measure aimed at consolidating and amending existing laws related to workplace safety.
- The OSH Code seeks to streamline and enhance the legal framework governing occupational safety and health in India.
- By unifying disparate regulations under a single code, it aims to provide a more cohesive and efficient system for ensuring workplace safety across different sectors and industries.

3. State Laws in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra:

a. Tamil Nadu:

- Tamil Nadu framed its rules under the Factories Act in 1950.
- Regulations mention a maximum wet bulb temperature of 30°C on shop floors, with provisions for adequate air movement.
- Rules lack specific breakdowns of thermal comfort based on activity levels or provisions for air conditioning, reflecting outdated standards.

b. Maharashtra:

- Maharashtra framed its rules under the Factories Act in 1963.
- Similar to Tamil Nadu, regulations specify maximum wet bulb temperatures and adequate air movement requirements.
- However, these rules also lack detailed provisions for modern cooling alternatives or thermal comfort adjustments based on evolving production processes.

Challenges in Dealing with Heat Hazards:

1. Lack of Specificity in Regulations:

- Existing regulations lack detailed guidelines regarding thermal comfort and air conditioning in workplaces.
- Regulations need to be updated to address modern cooling technologies and ensure worker comfort and safety.

2. Impact of Gig Economy:



- The growing gig economy in India contributes to increased susceptibility of workers to heat-related hazards.
- Gig workers, constituting a significant portion of the workforce, often lack protections and support against extreme heat conditions.

3. Pressure on Unions:

- Management and bureaucratic pressures on labour unions often prioritize industry interests over worker welfare.
- This dynamic can lead to neglect of worker safety concerns related to heat hazards and other climate-related risks.

4. Handling of Effluents and Byproducts:

- Disposal of effluents and byproducts poses health risks, particularly with temperature changes.

5. Silicosis in Mines and Quarries:

- Rising cases of silicosis due to silica exposure in mines and quarries present a significant occupational health concern.

6. Vacancies in Labor Inspection Departments:

- Vacancies and lack of competence in labour inspection departments hamper effective oversight of workplace safety.

Measures to Address Heat Hazards and Other Climate-Related Risks:

1. Update Regulatory Frameworks:

- Revise existing regulations to include specific guidelines for thermal comfort and air conditioning in workplaces.
- Incorporate technological advancements and modern cooling technologies to ensure worker safety and comfort.

2. Empower Labor Unions:

- Strengthen labor unions and provide them with support to advocate for worker welfare and safety.
- Encourage collaboration between unions, management, and government bodies to address heat hazards effectively.

3. Enhance Labor Inspection Mechanisms:

- Increase staffing and training in labor inspection departments to improve oversight of workplace safety.
- Implement regular inspections and stringent enforcement of safety regulations to protect workers from climate-related risks.

4. Invest in Research and Development:



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- Allocate resources for research and development initiatives focused on climate adaptation strategies for different industries.
- Support studies to assess the effectiveness of interventions and technologies in mitigating heat hazards and other climate-related risks.

5. Raise Awareness and Education:

- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate workers, employers, and the general public about the health risks associated with climate change.
- Provide training programs on heat stress management and preventive measures to enhance resilience in vulnerable sectors.

The ILO report highlights the need for a universally accepted regulatory framework to climate-proof work and workers. The focus must shift from solely economic and infrastructure resilience to include labour productivity, human health, and climate change.

