



UPSC @100-Navigating Civil Services Reforms

This editorial is based on “ [A 100-year journey as the guardian of meritocracy](#)”, which was published in The Hindu on 01/10/2025. The article commemorates the UPSC’s 100-year journey, highlighting its foundational role in upholding merit, integrity, and fairness in India’s civil service recruitment while adapting to contemporary challenges and reforms.

For Prelims: [Union Public Service Commission](#), [UPSC’s Centenary Year](#), [PRATIBHA Setu](#), [Lee Commission \(1924\)](#), [Government of India Act, 1919](#), [Government of India Act, 1935](#), [Civil Services Board \(CSB\)](#), [Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System \(CPGRAMS\)](#)

For Mains: Major Themes Commemorated During UPSC’s Centenary Year, UPSC Achievements have Shaped India’s Civil Services Landscape, Major Challenges Faced by the UPSC and Civil Services in India, Reforms to Modernise UPSC and Strengthen Civil Services in India

As the [Union Public Service Commission](#) marks a **century** since its inception, the story of India’s most esteemed **recruitment body** reflects the nation’s enduring commitment to **merit, integrity**, and **equal opportunity**. The UPSC is currently undergoing critical reforms to modernize its processes, but the bigger challenge lies beyond selection: **can India transform its civil services to prioritize innovation, lateral expertise, and performance over conformity and seniority?** The next century of public administration will depend not just on who enters the system, but on whether the civil services evolve into agile, accountable institutions capable of delivering governance befitting India’s aspirations as a global power.

What are the Major Themes Commemorated During UPSC’s Centenary Year?

- **Launch of a Commemorative Logo and Tagline:** The centenary celebrations included the unveiling of the **new UPSC logo**, reflecting the Commission’s role as a **guardian of trust** and **continuity**.
 - At its centre is the **national emblem**, symbolising **authority** and **service to the nation**, encircled by a **wreath of banyan leaves** representing **wisdom** and **resilience**. A **ribbon** inscribed with “**Sangh Lok Seva**” reinforces the ethos of **accountability** and **duty**.
 - The **Centenary Logo** complements this by representing **continuity** and **transformation**. Its **wave motif** signifies the UPSC’s **progressive, enduring**, and **adaptive** journey over a century, culminating in the final ‘**0**’ of ‘**100**’, where the UPSC logo rests, highlighting its **centrality** to every milestone in India’s **administrative evolution**.



- **Introduction of the PRATIBHA Setu Initiative:** PRATIBHA Setu is an **online platform** connecting candidates who **clear interviews** but do not make the **final selection** with alternate **employment opportunities** in **public** and **private sectors**.
 - This initiative reflects UPSC's commitment to **inclusive** and **pragmatic support** for **aspirants** beyond **examination results**.
- **Digital Transformation and Technology Adoption:** The UPSC **centenary year** has seen the introduction of advanced **digital technologies**, such as **face recognition** for applications, and the new **online portal "My UPSC Interview: From Dream to Reality."**
 - It will ensure greater **ease, security, and transparency** in **recruitment processes**, reflecting a **progressive modernisation** aligned with the demands of **21st-century governance**.
- **Engagement with Aspirants through Virtual Town Halls and Outreach:** The **Present Chairman of UPSC** conducted **live virtual sessions**, directly interacting with thousands of **UPSC aspirants** across **India**.
 - This **first-of-its-kind engagement** emphasised **motivational guidance** and **receptiveness** to aspirant concerns, reinforcing UPSC's role as a **facilitator** of the '**Indian Dream**' grounded in **meritocracy**.

What is the Historical Background and Constitutional Provisions Related to the Union Public Service Commission?

- **Formation of Public Service Commissions:** The [Government of India Act, 1919](#), provided for the establishment of a **Public Service Commission** in India to manage recruitment and control of public services.
 - On the recommendations of the **Lee Commission (1924)**, the **Public Service Commission** was created in 1926, with **Sir Ross Barker** as the first Chairman.
 - Further, the [Government of India Act, 1935](#), established a **Public Service Commission for the Federation** and a **Provincial Public Service Commission** for each province or group of provinces.
 - With the implementation of the Act, the Public Service Commission became the **Federal Public Service Commission**.
- **Post-Independence Reforms and Consolidation:** On **26th January 1950**, with the adoption of the Indian Constitution, the Federal Public Service Commission became the [Union Public Service Commission](#).
 - The Chairman and Members of the former Commission transitioned to the new body under **Article 378(1) of the Constitution**.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 312 of the Indian Constitution allows Parliament to create All India services, with recruitment handled by the UPSC. At the state level, recruitment is managed by **State Public Service Commissions (SPSC)**.
 - The UPSC and the SPSC are independent constitutional bodies. **Articles 315 to 323 (Part XIV)** of the Indian Constitution govern their composition, appointment, removal of members, and their powers and functions.

Constitutional Provisions Regarding Union Public Service Commission

Article 315

Establishes Public Service Commissions for the Union and States.

Article 316

Defines appointment and term of office for UPSC and SPSC members.

Article 317

Outlines removal and suspension procedures for UPSC and SPSC members.

Article 318

Grants power to regulate service conditions for Commission members and staff.

Article 319

Prohibits members from holding office after their term ends.

Article 320

Specifies the functions of Public Service Commissions.

Article 321

Allows for extending the functions of Public Service Commissions.

Article 322

Covers the expenses of Public Service Commissions.

Article 323

Mandates reports from Public Service Commissions.

What are the Recent Advancements and Reforms in the Indian Civil Services?

- **Mission Karmayogi**: Launched to enhance the **capacity** and **competency** of **civil servants**, it provides continuous, personalized **training** on **ethics**, **leadership**, and **digital skills** through the **iGOT-Karmayogi platform**.

- The programme supports a shift from **rule-based** to **role-based human resource management**, allocating **jobs** and training based on an officer's **competencies** rather than **fixed rules**.
- This initiative aims to make **officers adaptive, efficient**, and aligned with **modern governance** requirements.
- Additionally, **National Civil Services Day** celebrates **exemplary officers** annually, encouraging **ethical governance** and recognising **innovations** that improve **public administration**.
 - Officers like **Armstrong Pame**, known as the **"Miracle Man,"** mobilised **community resources** to construct essential **infrastructure** like **roads** in **remote Northeast India**, demonstrating **leadership, innovation**, and **public participation** beyond conventional **governance channels**.
- **Lateral Entry Scheme:** Introduced to bring in **domain experts** at **mid** and **senior levels**, it complements the **generalist bureaucracy** with **specialized knowledge** in critical sectors like **technology, health**, and the **economy**.
 - This ensures that **policy implementation** benefits from both **administrative experience** and **technical expertise**.
- **Enhanced Focus on Digital Governance and Transparency Tools:** Platforms such as **e-Samiksha**, **CPGRAMS**, and the **Aspirational Districts Program** leverage **technology** for **efficient service delivery** and **citizen engagement**.
 - **CPGRAMS** alone handles over **20 lakh grievances annually**, ensuring **timely redressal** and enhanced **transparency**.
 - **Civil Services' Role in Governance Innovation and Public Service Excellence** has led key **governance reforms**, including initiatives like **Madhya Pradesh's "Cyber Tehsil"** digital **land record management**, which increased **transparency** and reduced **case backlogs by 25%**.
- **360-Degree Appraisal System:** This system was introduced to replace the archaic **Annual Confidential Report (ACR)** that was often based solely on the superior's review.
 - The 360-degree appraisal includes confidential feedback from peers, subordinates, and stakeholders, providing a more holistic and objective assessment of an officer's performance, work-related attitude, and behaviour.
- **Assistant Secretary Programme:** It is an essential component of **induction training** for **newly recruited IAS officers**.
 - Launched in **2015**, the programme aims to expose young **IAS officers** to the **Union Government's policy-making processes** and **governance framework**.
 - The objective is to develop a **national perspective** and a **citizen-centric approach** among officers before they undertake **field duties**.

What are the Major Issues Hindering the Effectiveness of the Indian Civil Services?

- **Political Interference Undermining Neutrality:** Frequent **political meddling** compromises **bureaucratic independence** and **meritocracy**.
 - **For instance, Maharashtra** witnessed frequent **IAS officer transfers** in **2023**, with multiple **reshuffles** involving **8-10 officers** at a time, highlighting **political pressures** impacting **bureaucratic stability**.
 - A notable instance is that of **Ashok Khemka**, the **IAS officer** known for his steadfast **integrity**, who faced an extraordinary **57 transfers** over his **34-year career**.
 - The **Supreme Court's Prakash Singh ruling (2006)**, emphasising **UPSC consultation** in appointing **State Police Chiefs**, is often bypassed, eroding the system's **impartiality**.
- **Corruption and Administrative Inefficiency:** **Corruption scandals** and **red tape** persist, slowing **public service delivery**.
 - Instances like **manipulation in educational appointments** and **grant approvals** illustrate systemic **inefficiencies** impeded by **political interference** and **bureaucratic inertia**.
 - The **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988**, lacks a clear definition of **collusive**

corruption, which involves secret collaboration for mutual benefit, often harming the public interest. This legal gap weakens efforts to effectively address such corruption.

- **Article 311** offers broad protection to civil servants, often delaying action against corruption.

- **Lack of Domain-Specific Expertise:** Generalist officers face difficulty managing **technical portfolios** like **health** or **infrastructure**.
 - Despite **lateral entry schemes** introduced since **2019**, only about **63 experts** have joined, highlighting ongoing **expertise gaps**.
- **Resistance to Administrative Reforms:** A survey found that many **officers** resist **power devolution** to **local governments**, limiting **grassroots responsiveness**.
 - This **resistance** slows the adoption of **decentralisation**, vital for **federal governance**.
- **Vacancies and High Job Stress:** Significant **vacancies** exist, e.g., approximately **1,500 IAS posts** remain unfilled, affecting **governance efficiency**, especially in critical roles in **Railways** and **law enforcement**, with **20% vacancies**.
 - Officers face constant **public pressure**, long **work hours**, and **emotional stress**, contributing to **burnout** and **attrition**.
 - Over the last decade, **853 Indian Revenue Service officers** opted for **voluntary retirement**, reflecting **stress** and **dissatisfaction factors**.
 - Limited **institutional support** for **mental well-being** exacerbates the problem.
- **Lengthy UPSC Exam Cycle and Aspirant Challenges:** The **UPSC exam** spans over a **year**, with a vast **syllabus** and low **success rates (less than 1%)**, causing **financial** and **emotional strain** on **aspirants**, potentially limiting **civil service diversity** and **access**.
 - The **low success rate** fosters a "**fear of failure**" and a dangerous '**sunk cost fallacy**' where **aspirants** continue preparing despite **diminishing returns**, simply because they've already **invested years** of their **prime professional life**.
 - This often results in **burnout**, **anxiety**, and **social isolation**, representing a significant **loss of human capital** for the **nation**.

What Reforms Can be Adopted to Strengthen Civil Services in India?

- **Introduce Fixed Tenures and Civil Services Boards:** Fixed tenure norms for officers reduce political interference and arbitrary transfers, protecting **bureaucratic neutrality**.
 - Ensure **protection from political interference** while holding civil servants accountable through clear service rules and a strong **Civil Services Board (CSB)**.
- **Expand Lateral Entry and Domain Expertise Recruitment:** Institutionalising **lateral entry** for **mid-career experts** addresses **skill gaps** in specialised sectors like **technology**, **economy**, and **health**.
 - Currently, limited **lateral hires** are augmented by fresh proposals to boost **diversity** and **expertise** within the **services**.
 - The **2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), 2005** recommended lateral entry into the civil services to **infuse specialised knowledge and expertise** that traditional generalist officers might lack.
 - **Global Examples:** The UK and Singapore civil services regularly induct professionals from academia and the private sector.
- **Enhance Capacity Building and Continuous Performance Review:** **Mission Karmayogi** and periodic **360-degree appraisals** ensure continuous **skill upgradation** and **accountability**, making **officers** adaptive to evolving **governance demands**.
 - Both the **Surendranath Committee (2003)** and the **Baswan Committee (2016)** recommended the promotion of domain specialisation by identifying and grooming officers for sectoral leadership in areas such as health, infrastructure, and education.
- **Implement UPSC 2.0 Reforms for Exam Modernisation:** Building on proposals like those from former **RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao**, **provisions related to recruitment should evolve to** reduce **upper age limits**, limit **attempts**, and introduce **mid-career entry points** for **experienced professionals** in their **40s in a gradually phased manner**.
 - This reform compresses **lengthy preparation cycles**, saving **valuable years** and diversifying **talent** by blending **youth energy** with **seasoned expertise**.

- Ensure representation of women and persons with disabilities not only in entry-level but also in leadership roles
 - Effectively implement Initiatives like **PRATIBHA Setu for Mains-qualified but unselected candidates** with **employment opportunities** in **public/private sectors** recognise their **merit** and reduce **preparation-related uncertainties**.
- **Promoting Ethics and Integrity:** Establish **Ethics Commissions** at the central and state levels to guide officers.
 - Introduce regular modules on public service values through the [National Learning Week under the Mission Karmayogi](#), where civil servants take an annual oath to uphold integrity, ethics, and constitutional values.
 - Strengthen institutions like the [Lokpal and, Central Vigilance Commission \(CVC\)](#) to curb corruption.
 - The **2nd ARC, 2005** recommended shifting to Article 309 for reasonable safeguards, enabling quicker disciplinary action.
 - The **UK's Nolan Committee (1994)** outlined seven core principles to guide public officials' ethical conduct, which includes **selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership aimed at upholding ethics in public life**.
 - India must institutionalise such values to strengthen ethical standards in governance.
- **Improving Work Culture and Grievance Redressal:** Foster a people-centric and service-oriented work culture.
 - Digitise grievance redressal through platforms like [Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System \(CPGRAMS\)](#), and strengthen feedback loops.
 - Encourage innovation and risk-taking by rewarding performance and protecting against vindictive action for bona fide decisions.
 - Ensure leveraging technology for transparency and ease, like **UPSC's new online application portals** with **face-recognition** and **real-time updates** streamline **candidate management** and curb **impersonation**.

Conclusion :

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel famously called **civil servants** the “**steel frame of India,**” emphasising their **vital role** in holding the nation's **administration** together. To honour this **legacy**, India's **civil services** must now be tempered with **transparency**, strengthened by **reforms**, and empowered to serve with **integrity** and **adaptability**. Only then can they continue to drive India's **progress** as the **resilient backbone** of its **democracy**.

Drishti Mains Question:

The civil services are often called the “steel frame” of India, holding together the administrative fabric of the nation. How can reforms ensure this steel frame remains both resilient and adaptable in the face of contemporary governance challenges?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1.How did UPSC evolve historically?

Ans: Started in 1926 (Lee Commission), became Federal PSC in 1935, and UPSC post-1950 Constitution (Articles 315-323).

Q2.How does UPSC ensure merit and inclusivity?

Ans: Through competitive exams, representation of SC/ST/OBC/EWS/PwBD, specialised cadres like IES/ISS, and PRATIBHA Setu.

Q3.What major challenges does UPSC face?

Ans: Political interference, lack of expertise, corruption, vacancies, resistance to reforms, and stress.

Q4.What reforms can strengthen UPSC and civil services?

Ans: UPSC 2.0, lateral entry, fixed tenures, Mission Karmayogi, digital processes, and ethics frameworks.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2015)

1. The Executive Power of the Union of India is vested in the Prime Minister.
2. The Prime Minister is the ex officio Chairman of the Civil Services Board.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q.“Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance”.In this context, suggest reforms in the Civil Service for strengthening democracy. **(2020)**