



Proposed NFSA Amendment to Revise Antyodaya Anna Yojana Entitlements Triggers Debate over Equity and Food Security

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Recent Developments:

- The **Union Government** has released the **Draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, proposing significant changes to foodgrain entitlements under the **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**.
- The draft replaces the existing **fixed household entitlement of 35 kg per month** with a **per-beneficiary entitlement of 7 kg per month**, subject to a **maximum ceiling of 35 kg per household**.
- After examining public feedback, the **Central Government** is expected to consult **State Governments** and other stakeholders before introducing the Bill in **Parliament**.

Draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026:

About the Proposed Amendment:

- The proposed amendment seeks to revise foodgrain entitlements for **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** beneficiaries under the **National Food Security Act, 2013**.
- The objective is to replace the existing household-based entitlement with a **person-based entitlement**, while retaining a ceiling of **35 kg per household**.
- The proposal intends to reduce disparities in per-capita foodgrain allocation among households of different sizes.

Existing Provision:

- Every **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** household currently receives **35 kg of foodgrains per month**, irrespective of the number of family members.
- The entitlement is based on the **household**, rather than the number of individual beneficiaries.

Proposed Entitlement Structure:

- Every eligible **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** beneficiary would receive **7 kg of foodgrains per month**.
- The entitlement would remain subject to a **maximum household limit of 35 kg per month**.
- Households with **five or more members** would receive the full **35 kg**, while smaller households would receive proportionately lower quantities.

Illustration of the Proposed Distribution:

- **One-member household** would receive **7 kg** instead of **35 kg**.
- **Two-member household** would receive **14 kg** instead of **35 kg**.
- **Three-member household** would receive **21 kg** instead of **35 kg**.
- **Four-member household** would receive **28 kg** instead of **35 kg**.

- **Households with more than five members** would continue receiving **35 kg**, reducing the effective per-capita entitlement below **7 kg**.

Government's Rationale Behind the Amendment:

Ensuring Equity in Distribution:

- The proposal seeks to remove disparities whereby smaller households currently receive a higher **per-capita** quantity than larger households.
- The amendment attempts to establish a more uniform distribution of foodgrains among beneficiaries.

Improving Resource Allocation:

- The proposed system aims to rationalise foodgrain distribution by linking entitlements with the number of beneficiaries.
- The Government also argues that the reform aligns foodgrain allocation more closely with estimated consumption requirements.

National Food Security Act, 2013:

Background:

- The **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** converted food security from a welfare programme into a **legal entitlement** enforceable by beneficiaries.
- The Act seeks to ensure **food and nutritional security** by providing subsidised foodgrains to eligible households.

Coverage:

- The Act covers up to **75% of the rural population** and **50% of the urban population**.
- Overall, nearly **two-thirds of India's population** is eligible under the Act.

Foodgrain Entitlements:

- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** households receive **35 kg of foodgrains per household per month**.
- **Priority Households** receive **5 kg of foodgrains per person per month**.

Identification of Beneficiaries:

- **State Governments** and **Union Territories** identify eligible households.
- States issue **ration cards**, update beneficiary databases and remove ineligible beneficiaries while including eligible left-out families.

Women-Centric Provision:

- The eldest woman aged **18 years or above** is designated as the **head of the household** for issuing ration cards.

Life-Cycle Nutritional Support:

- **Pregnant women, lactating mothers** and **children aged 6 months to 14 years** receive nutritional support through **Anganwadi Centres** and schools.
- Pregnant and lactating women are entitled to a **maternity benefit of at least ₹6,000**, subject to applicable schemes.

Food Security Allowance:

- Beneficiaries are entitled to receive a **Food Security Allowance** if the prescribed foodgrains or cooked meals are not supplied.

Division of Responsibilities:

- The **Central Government** procures, allocates and transports foodgrains while providing financial assistance.
- **State Governments** identify beneficiaries, distribute foodgrains through **Fair Price Shops**, monitor implementation and establish grievance redressal mechanisms.

Subsidised Prices and Reforms:

- The Act originally prescribed subsidised prices of **₹3/kg for rice, ₹2/kg for wheat and ₹1/kg for coarse grains**.
- The Act also provides **tide-over allocation** to protect State quotas and permits **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** of food subsidy in notified areas.

Major Concerns Regarding the Proposed Amendment:

Reduced Benefits for Smaller Households:

- One- to four-member households would receive substantially lower foodgrain quantities than under the existing system.
- Elderly couples, widows, persons with disabilities and nuclear families may experience a significant reduction in food support.

Household Ceiling Creates Inequity:

- The **35 kg ceiling** limits the benefit for households with more than five members.
- Consequently, larger families would receive less than **7 kg per beneficiary**, weakening the principle of per-person entitlement.

Regional Imbalance:

- States with smaller average household sizes, particularly many southern States, may receive comparatively lower allocations.
- Critics argue that States which successfully implemented population stabilisation could be disproportionately affected.

Limited Nutritional Coverage:

- The proposal continues to focus primarily on cereals.
- Pulses, edible oils and protein-rich foods remain outside the entitlement despite their importance for balanced nutrition.

Outdated Beneficiary Base:

- Beneficiary coverage continues to rely largely on the **2011 Census**.
- Population growth has resulted in many eligible households remaining outside the coverage limits.

Persistent Access Barriers:

- The amendment does not address exclusion arising from **biometric authentication failures, e-KYC issues**, migration and the absence of stable residential proof.
- Food-rights groups argue that these implementation challenges continue to weaken the rights-based framework of the **National Food Security Act**.

Constitutional and Policy Significance:

Directive Principles of State Policy:

- **Article 39(b)** directs the State to ensure equitable distribution of material resources for the common good.
- **Article 47** makes improvement of nutrition, public health and the standard of living a primary duty of the State.

Right to Food Jurisprudence:

- The **Supreme Court** has interpreted the **Right to Life under Article 21** to include the **Right to Food** through a series of judicial decisions.
- The **National Food Security Act** operationalises this constitutional commitment by creating enforceable statutory entitlements.

Way Forward:

Protect Existing Entitlements:

- No **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** household should receive less than the existing **35 kg monthly entitlement**, particularly vulnerable households comprising elderly persons, widows and persons with disabilities.

Remove the Household Ceiling:

- If per-person entitlement is adopted, the **35 kg household ceiling** should be removed to ensure equal entitlement for larger families.

Improve Nutritional Diversity:

- Food assistance should gradually include **pulses, edible oils, millets** and other protein-rich foods to improve nutritional outcomes.

Update Beneficiary Coverage:

- Coverage under the **National Food Security Act** should be revised using updated population estimates instead of continuing to rely primarily on the **2011 Census**.

Strengthen Delivery Mechanisms:

- Alternative authentication mechanisms should be introduced wherever biometric verification fails.
- Greater consultation with **State Governments**, nutrition experts and civil society organisations should precede any major amendment.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Food Security Schemes:

- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (2000)**: Provides highly subsidised foodgrains to the poorest households.
- **National Food Security Act, 2013**: Provides legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrains.

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana:** Provides additional free foodgrains during notified periods through the **Public Distribution System**.
- **One Nation One Ration Card:** Enables nationwide portability of ration benefits for eligible beneficiaries.

Related Institutions:

- **Food Corporation of India (FCI):** Procures, stores and transports foodgrains for the **Public Distribution System**.
- **Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC):** Provides scientific storage infrastructure for foodgrains.
- **Department of Food and Public Distribution:** Frames policies relating to procurement, storage and distribution of foodgrains