

Citizen's Charter

[UPSC Notes]

What is Citizen Charter?

The Citizen Charter is a revolutionary concept introduced in 1997 with the aim of enhancing the quality of public services. It was brought in force to include quality, standards, choice, accountability, responsibility, and transparency within the services provided to the citizens or customers.

The Citizen charter can be cited as the statement of the areas of the services offered, including the details of the process of all the services individually. The idea of the inclusion of the Citizen Charter in every institution was to benefit every citizen with all the kinds of services offered there. The Citizen's Charter is a document that outlines the organization's commitment to its citizens in terms of service quality, information, accessibility, grievance resolution, and value for money.

Citizen Charter Meaning

The idea of a Citizen Charter in India is adopted from Britain, where in 1991, the concept of a Citizen Charter was introduced for the first time by the then Prime Minister, John Major.

- The Citizen Charter usually contains lists of the services offered by the institution along with the process to achieve the services.
- It also contains information about grievance redressal mechanisms in the event of the failure of any listed service.
- The citizen charter was introduced with the view of establishing a trust factor between the service provider and the one who is availing of the services.
- The usage of the Citizen Charter ensures the service quality and lets the user choose the services according to his convenience.
- The Citizen Charter ensures value for the taxpayer's money.
- The Citizen Charter ensures accountability and a sense of responsibility among the service providers, both collectively and individually.
- It brings transparency to the working procedures of the service providers.

Components of Citizen Charter

A Citizen charter could be considered to be helpful if it holds the following components:

- A Citizen charter should display the statement of services offered along with their procedures.

- It must indicate the aim and idea of the service provider.
- The Citizen charter should contain all the details of the organizations, displaying all the authenticity and authorization.
- The difference between the one who offers the service and the one who avails of the service should be clearly explained in a good Citizen charter.
- A good Citizen charter always informs the citizen about the grievance redressal process available in that organization to the citizen.
- A Citizen charter should be in easy and understandable language, and it should be citizen-centric.

Importance of Citizen Charter

A Citizen charter proves to be a strong accouterment for a citizen when it comes to public services offered by a department or an organization. Its importance can be justified in the following ways:

- A Citizen charter enhances the sense of responsibility and accountability while providing any particular service.
- It could be considered a report card of good governance.
- The efficiency of an organization is increased if it follows the concept of the Citizen charter honestly and implements the concept.
- The quality of the services provided is automatically enhanced as the proceedings are continuously observed.
- Its benefit of being a citizen-oriented concept is reflected as it creates a professional environment.

Citizen Charter in India

After the discussion in 1997, The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011 (Citizens Charter) was presented in the Lok Sabha in 2011. The bill was also known as Citizen's Charter and Grievance Redressal Bill 2011 or Citizen's Charter Bill.

- The bill suggested that it would be mandatory for every public institution to publish the citizen charter within 6 months of the commencement of act or will be fined Rs. 50,000.
- It was later referred to a standing committee requesting a report in 2012.
- Finally, the Citizen Charter Bill lapsed due to the Lok Sabha dissolution in 2014.

It is important to note that Citizen Charter is not legally enforceable, they are just guidelines for better service.

2nd ARC Recommendations for Citizen Charter in India.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (AC) had made suggestions for improvement of the citizen charters' effectiveness in India. Some of the recommendations are:

- Compensation or remedy must be specified in case of standards not being met.
- Proper restructuring of the organization before making the charter.
- Focus on a citizen-friendly redressal mechanism.
- Proper accountability.
- Must be reviewed and revised regularly.

Indian Experience of Citizens Charter

The challenges in the implementation of the Citizen charter in India are mentioned below:

- The ignorance about the Citizen charter among the common people
- The extra task of executing the Citizen charter in every organization may divert the officers from their original responsibilities.
- The Citizen Charter is not binding in nature and hence could not be legally enforced on the organizations and departments.
- The unavailability of properly trained staff creates another havoc in the way of implementation of the Citizen Charter.
- The complexity of the working procedures in some departments tends to confuse more than help.
- Most organizations do not show any interest in the implementation of the Citizen charter so as to save themselves from any extra work.