

- **Lack of awareness:** Poor awareness of lawful abortion care and contraception is pervasive in India. Further, both the availability and accessibility of abortion services in rural districts are an issue.
- **Barriers to reproductive rights:** India has amongst one of the highest numbers of maternal deaths (103 in 2017-19) worldwide due to poor quality health services and denial of women's and girls' decision-making authority. The MMR, however, dropped from 122 in 2015-17, and continues to drop further.
- **Failure of implementation of standards and guidelines:** Public policies surrounding reproductive rights are still largely focused on sterilization as opposed to other methods of contraception.

Steps that can be taken to address above impediments:

- SRHR information and services should be made **accessible and affordable to all individuals** regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or socio-economic status to exercise their reproductive autonomy. Further, incentive schemes for sterilization must be made gender neutral.
- Programmes initiated by the government related to family planning, encouraging contraceptive options etc. should **engage men to become supportive partners in SRHR** while protecting women's autonomy in sexual and reproductive decision-making.
- **Comprehensive sexuality education** needs to be disseminated to address widespread taboos and misconceptions around sexuality. NGOs and civil society organisations can aid the government in this regard.
- There is a need to address the **acute shortfall of public health care infrastructure in the primary, secondary, and tertiary-level services**, which includes access to free medicines, free diagnostics, and availability of skilled human resources.

The Supreme Court judgments such as *Puttaswamy v. Union of India*, *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* and *Independent Thought v. Union of India* have rightly highlighted the right to dignity, privacy, autonomy and bodily integrity and their relationship to sexual and reproductive rights. There is a need to involve all stakeholders (government, citizens, civil society, private sector) for effective implementation and governance in the discourse of universalization of SRHR.

9. State the functions of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Also, discuss the issues faced by the Council in the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. (150 words) 10

Approach:

- Give a brief introduction of the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Write the functions of the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Mention the hurdles faced by the Council in promotion and protection of human rights around the globe.
- Conclude with a suitable way forward.

Answer:

The **Human Rights Council** is an **inter-governmental body** within the **United Nations system** and is made up of **47 United Nations Member States**, which are elected by the **UN General Assembly**. It meets at the **UN Office at Geneva**.

Functions of the United Nations Human Rights Council:

- It is responsible for promoting universal respect for the **protection of all human rights** and fundamental freedoms for all. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
- It aims to **prevent and combat human rights violations**, including gross and systematic violations, and to make recommendations thereon.
- It also works to **promote and coordinate the mainstreaming of human rights** within the UN system.