UPSC CSE - 2025

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India's Gaps in Gender Equality Metrics: A Critical Assessment

GS Paper II – Governance | Social Justice | Women Empowerment

Why in News?

India ranked **131st out of 148 countries** in the **Global Gender Gap Index 2025** released by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**, slipping two places from its 129th rank in 2024.

While **marginal improvements** were recorded in education, health, and economic participation, the decline was primarily attributed to **deteriorating performance in political empowerment**, exposing persistent gender disparities at leadership levels.

Understanding the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)

- Published annually by the **World Economic Forum**, the index measures gender-based gaps across **four key dimensions**:
    1. **Economic Participation and Opportunity**
    2. **Educational Attainment**
    3. **Health and Survival**
    4. **Political Empowerment**
- It reflects **gender parity**, not overall development levels. A higher rank implies **less disparity** between men and women.

India's Sector-wise Performance (2025):

Dimension	Status
Economic Participation	Improved slightly but still marked by low female labour force participation (around 25%) and high wage gaps
Education	Near parity in school enrolment; however, drop-out rates among adolescent girls remain high
Health and Survival	Continued to show stable performance, but concerns over sex ratio and maternal health persist
Political Empowerment	Worsened considerably – major contributor to overall decline in ranking

Regional Comparison:

- India ranked **lower than all South Asian neighbours** except **Maldives (138)** and **Pakistan (148)**.

- **Bangladesh** made **remarkable progress**, rising 75 places to **24th**, attributed to higher representation of women in governance and workforce.
- Other South Asian countries:
  - **Nepal** – Rank 125
  - **Bhutan** – Rank 119
  - **Sri Lanka** – Rank 130
- **Global Leaders**:
  - **Iceland** topped the index for the 16th year in a row
  - Followed by **Finland, Norway, UK, and New Zealand**

Challenges in Political Empowerment:

Despite increasing voter turnout among women, their **presence in decision-making roles** remains disproportionately low.

Current Political Representation in India (2024–25):

Level	Statistics
Lok Sabha (2024)	74 women MPs (**13.6%**) – slight decline from 78 MPs in 2019
Union Council of Ministers	**5.56%** women ministers – down from 6.45% in the previous term
State Assemblies	Average: ~**9%**; Highest – Chhattisgarh (18%), Lowest – Mizoram (0%)

Women's Reservation Act – Progress and Limitations:

- **Passed in 2023**, the 33% reservation for women in **Lok Sabha and State Assemblies** is a landmark law.
- However, **implementation is deferred until after the next census and delimitation**, making **2029** the earliest possible rollout.

Concerns and Limitations:

- **Limited Window**: The reservation is valid for **only 15 years**, covering likely **two general elections** (2029 and 2034).
- **Delayed Impact**: No immediate political transformation despite legal reform.
- **Leadership Pipeline Deficit**:
  - **Decades of reservation** at local levels (panchayats and municipalities) have not translated into **elevation to higher political roles**.

- Lack of political mentoring, funding access, and internal party support for women aspirants.

Broader Structural Challenges:

1. **Labour Force Participation**
   - One of the **lowest globally** among major economies.
   - Gendered work expectations, safety concerns, and lack of care infrastructure deter women's employment.
2. **Educational Dropouts**
   - High drop-out rates for girls post-primary due to **child marriage**, **domestic responsibilities**, or **economic constraints**.
3. **Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes**
   - Patriarchal attitudes continue to limit women's freedom and political agency.
4. **Economic Disempowerment**
   - Wage gaps, lack of asset ownership, and informal sector employment reduce economic bargaining power.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Expedite Implementation** of the Women's Reservation Act post-Census and delimitation.
2. **Extend Reservation Tenure** beyond 15 years to institutionalize gender balance in politics.
3. **Strengthen Leadership Pipelines**
   - Training and capacity-building programs for women leaders
   - Public funding support for female candidates
4. **Gender-Sensitive Party Reforms**
   - Internal quotas in party leadership and candidate selection processes
5. **Enhance Data Transparency**
   - Publish regular **gender-disaggregated data** on political participation, employment, wages, and education.

Conclusion:

India's decline in the Global Gender Gap Index highlights that **legal reforms alone are insufficient** to address deep-rooted gender disparities. Sustainable improvement requires **multi-dimensional interventions**—from early education to political mentorship, from grassroots empowerment to systemic accountability. Gender equality must not only be a constitutional promise but also a **measurable governance priority**.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q "Despite constitutional guarantees and legal reforms, India continues to struggle with gender equality, particularly in political representation." Critically examine the factors responsible for this gap and suggest measures for sustained gender parity in public life.

India's Status on Child Labour

GS Paper II – Governance | Welfare of Vulnerable Sections | GS Paper III – Human Resource Development

Why in News?

Telangana, Bihar, and Rajasthan recorded the highest number of **child labour rescues and arrests** under child labour laws in 2024–25. The report raises urgent concerns over the **worst forms of child labour**, despite constitutional and legal safeguards.

Alarming Trends:

- **90% of rescued children** were engaged in activities listed under **"worst forms of child labour"** by **ILO Convention 182**, ratified by India in 2017.
- Common sectors of abuse include:
  - Spas and massage parlours
  - Orchestras and informal entertainment
  - Domestic work
  - Sex trafficking and pornography
- These trends point to a **dangerous overlap** between **child labour and child exploitation**, especially in urban informal sectors.

Legal and Policy Framework in India:

Law / Instrument	Key Provisions
Article 23 & 24 (Constitution)	Prohibit forced labour and employment of children below 14 years in hazardous work
Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009	Mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14
Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, amended 2016	Prohibits employment of children below 14 and regulates adolescent labour (14–18 years)
Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015	Treats working children as children in need of care and protection

ILO Conventions 138 & 182	India ratified both; set minimum age standards and prohibit hazardous labour

Challenges in Enforcement:

1. **Informal Sector Dominance**
   - Most child labour occurs in unregulated sectors with limited monitoring.
2. **Poor Rehabilitation Infrastructure**
   - Lack of coordinated **rehabilitation and reintegration support** for rescued children.
3. **Socio-Economic Pressures**
   - Poverty, illiteracy, gender discrimination, and rural distress drive child labour.
4. **Low Conviction Rates**
   - Many cases do not result in meaningful legal punishment, creating impunity.
5. **Education Gaps**
   - RTE covers only up to age 14, leaving adolescents vulnerable to exploitation.

Key Recommendations from the 2025 Report:

1. **National Mission to End Child Labour**
   - Centrally coordinated mission with budget, dedicated personnel, and monitoring frameworks.
2. **District-Level Task Forces**
   - Localised vigilance and rescue operations through proactive enforcement teams.
3. **Child Labour Rehabilitation Fund**
   - Pooling of employer penalties to finance child recovery and education.
4. **Comprehensive National Rehabilitation Policy**
   - Guidelines on health, counselling, vocational training, and community reintegration.
5. **Extend Compulsory Education to 18 Years**
   - Aligns with SDG 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education).
6. **Zero-Tolerance in Government Procurement**
   - No contracts to suppliers involved in child labour practices.

7. **State-Specific Policies**
   ○ Tailored solutions considering regional disparities, migration trends, and local industries.
8. **Update Hazardous Occupation List**
   ○ Inclusion of **digital/online exploitation**, spas, entertainment sectors, and trafficking-related work.
9. **Extend SDG 8.7 Deadline to 2030**
   ○ Recognizes that complete eradication by 2025 is impractical and requires more time and investment.

Significance of These Measures:

- Fosters alignment with **constitutional morality and international obligations**.
- Reduces **inter-generational poverty cycles** by re-integrating children into education.
- Helps meet **SDG Targets 8.7** (end child labour), **4.1** (free, quality primary and secondary education), and **16.2** (end abuse and exploitation).

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II):

Q "Child labour in India today is no longer confined to traditional industries but has taken new exploitative forms in urban informal sectors." Examine the legal framework and evaluate recent policy recommendations to address this issue.

India Enters Top 100 in Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index – 2025

GS Paper II – Governance | GS Paper III – Environment and Development | International Reports and Indices

India's Milestone Achievement:

For the first time since the inception of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **India has secured a position among the top 100 countries** in the global SDG Index. According to the **2025 edition** of the **Sustainable Development Report (SDR)**, India has climbed to the **99th position out of 167 nations**, a significant rise from its **109th rank in 2024**.

This improvement reflects India's **growing commitment to sustainable development** and the increasing effectiveness of its efforts across the **17 UN-adopted SDGs**, which aim to eradicate poverty, ensure inclusive growth, protect the environment, and promote peace and justice by **2030**.

About the SDG Index:

- The **SDG Index** is published annually by the **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)**.
- It evaluates the performance of countries across **169 targets under 17 goals**.
- Scores are measured on a **scale from 0 to 100**, with **100 signifying full achievement** of the goals.
- In the 2025 report, **India achieved a score of 67**, indicating consistent progress over the past several years.

Comparative Regional Performance:

Country	2025 Rank	Score
Bhutan	74	70.5
Nepal	85	68.6
India	99	67.0
Bangladesh	114	63.9
Sri Lanka	93	–
Maldives	53	–
Pakistan	140	57.0

India's steady ascent in the rankings—from **116th in 2017 to 109th in 2024 and now 99th**—underscores an upward development trajectory in social, economic, and environmental metrics.

Global and Regional Insights:

- Despite India's improvement, the **2025 SDR highlights that global progress on the SDGs is stagnating**.
- Only **17% of SDG targets are currently on track** for achievement by 2030.
- Key barriers include **geopolitical conflicts, economic vulnerabilities**, and **financial constraints**, especially in **low-income and fragile states**.

Top-performing nations continue to be **European countries**, with:

- **Finland, Sweden**, and **Denmark** securing the top three positions.
- **19 of the top 20 countries** are located in Europe.
- However, these nations face challenges in goals related to **climate action and biodiversity**, due to **unsustainable consumption and production patterns**.

Bright Spots in Asia and the Global South:

- **East and South Asia** are identified as the **fastest progressing regions** since 2015, largely due to accelerated **socio-economic development**.
- Noteworthy Asian improvers:
  - **Nepal (+11.1 points)**
  - **Cambodia (+10.0)**
  - **The Philippines (+8.6)**
  - **Bangladesh (+8.3)**
  - **Mongolia (+7.7)**
- Globally, standout improvers include:
  - **Benin (+14.5)**
  - **Uzbekistan (+12.1)**
  - **UAE (+9.9)**
  - **Saudi Arabia (+8.1)**
  - **Peru (+8.7)**

These trends reflect the growing emphasis on inclusive development, environmental sustainability, and innovation in public policy among emerging economies.

Significance for India:

- India's progress is the result of multiple aligned initiatives including:
  - **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** (SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation)
  - **PM Ujjwala Yojana** (SDG 3 – Good Health)
  - **Jal Jeevan Mission, PM-KISAN, Ayushman Bharat**, and others
  - **Aspirational Districts Programme** targeting SDGs at local levels
- Improved tracking through the **SDG India Index (developed by NITI Aayog)** has helped in state-level benchmarking and competition.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper II / III):

Q "India's rise in the Global SDG Index 2025 is commendable, yet significant challenges remain in meeting the 2030 Agenda." Critically examine the areas of progress and the roadblocks India must address to sustain SDG momentum.

Urban Poverty in India: Causes, Challenges, and Solutions

Why in the News?

The **Odisha government** has launched the **'SAHAYOG' initiative**, aiming to bridge the gap between **urban poor** and **government welfare schemes** through mass awareness and doorstep delivery of services. This highlights the growing

focus on tackling **urban poverty**, a challenge gaining prominence with India's rapid urbanization.

Urbanization and Urban Poverty: The Indian Context

- **Urban growth** has accelerated: from **17.29% in 1951** to **31.16% in 2011**, and is projected to exceed **50% by 2050** (UN).
- According to the **World Bank Poverty & Equity Brief (2023)**:
  - **Extreme poverty** in urban India fell from **10.7% (2011–12)** to **1.1% (2022–23)**.
  - At the **lower-middle-income poverty line** of $3.65/day, urban poverty dropped from **43.5%** to **17.2%**.
  - **Urban inequality** improved: Gini index fell from **28.8 to 25.5**.
  - **Urban unemployment** dropped to **6.6% in Q1 FY24/25**, the lowest since 2017–18.
  - Despite these improvements, **structural issues and social exclusion** persist.

Characteristics of Urban Poverty:

- Inadequate access to **basic services** (water, sanitation, housing).
- High population density in **slums** and informal settlements.
- **Greater relative deprivation** and visible inequality (e.g. slums near high-rises).
- Higher exposure to **health risks, crime**, and **psychological stress**.
- **Job insecurity**, informality, and underemployment despite better economic opportunities.

Urban vs. Rural Poverty: A Comparative View

Aspect	Urban Poverty	Rural Poverty
Amenities	Poor housing, sanitation, services	Lack of roads, health, and education
Livelihoods	Informal services, casual labor	Agriculture-dependent, seasonal work
Visibility	High—due to urban wealth contrast	Lower—poverty more normalized
Social Impact	Relative deprivation, social exclusion	Caste and gender-based discrimination
Economic Complexity	Diverse, service-led	Agrarian economy

Key Reasons for Persistent Urban Poverty:

1. **Unplanned Urbanization**: Lack of housing, transport, and sanitation in growing cities.
2. **Migration Without Integration**: Rural migrants often lack IDs, ration cards, or voting rights in cities.
3. **Policy Blind Spots**: Urban poor are often **unrecognized** in formal statistics or welfare mapping.
4. **Cycle of Poverty**: Poor access to education and healthcare leads to **intergenerational poverty**.
5. **Regional Disparities**: Lack of investment in **Tier-II/III cities** puts pressure on megacities.

Government Schemes to Address Urban Poverty:

Scheme	Focus Area
SAHAYOG (Odisha)	Mass awareness and scheme access
PMAY-Urban	Affordable housing for urban poor
DAY-NULM	Skill development and employment
PM SVANidhi	Micro-credit for street vendors
One Nation One Ration Card	Portability of food entitlements
Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban 2.0	Sanitation and hygiene improvements
Smart Cities Mission / AMRUT 2.0	Urban infrastructure and service delivery

Way Forward:

1. **Inclusive Urban Planning**:
   ○ Participatory urban governance with **community involvement** (e.g. Kudumbashree in Kerala).
   ○ Promote **mixed-income neighborhoods** to avoid ghettoization.
2. **Strengthening Tier-II/III Cities**:
   ○ Improve **connectivity, employment, and services** to reduce migration pressure.
   ○ Encourage **decentralized industrial and IT growth hubs**.
3. **Targeted Social Protection**:
   ○ Improve **beneficiary identification**.
   ○ Enhance portability and reduce **inclusion/exclusion errors**.
4. **Empowering the Urban Poor**:
   ○ Expand access to **MSMEs, skill development**, and financial services.

- Create safety nets for **informal sector workers**.
5. **Sustainable Urbanization**:
    - Empower **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** for effective service delivery.
    - Integrate **climate resilience** into slum redevelopment (e.g. Indore's SBM success).

Conclusion:

As India urbanizes, cities will become the **drivers of economic growth**— contributing over **75% of GDP** and accounting for **60% of GHG emissions** by 2050. Alleviating **urban poverty** is thus critical for:

- Achieving **sustainable urban development**.
- Realizing the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.
- Enabling India's transformation into a **$5 trillion economy**.

<u>**Model UPSC Mains Questions**</u>

<u>**GS Paper II – Governance, Social Justice:**</u>

Q **Discuss the key challenges in addressing urban poverty in India. Suggest a roadmap to make urban development inclusive and equitable. (15 marks)**

Q **The urban poor face both economic and psychological challenges in India's cities. Examine this statement in light of recent initiatives to address urban poverty. (10 marks)**

<u>**GS Paper III – Inclusive Growth:**</u>

Q **How does urban poverty differ from rural poverty in terms of causes, consequences, and solutions? Evaluate the role of government policies in addressing both. (15 marks)**

<u>Mizoram Achieves Full Functional Literacy: A Milestone in India's Literacy Journey</u>

Context:

Recently, Mizoram's Chief Minister officially declared Mizoram as the first Indian state to achieve **full functional literacy** with a literacy rate of 98.20% as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24. This is a significant achievement following Ladakh's declaration as the first administrative unit with full functional literacy in June 2024. Goa became the second state to reach this milestone.

Understanding Literacy and Functional Literacy:

- **Literacy** (as per Office of Registrar General of India): A person aged 7 and above who can read and write with understanding in any language.

- **Functional Literacy:** Goes beyond basic reading and writing; it refers to the ability to comprehend, apply, and communicate information effectively in daily life. It includes:
  - Reading and understanding instructions,
  - Filling out forms,
  - Using technology,
  - Making informed decisions based on written information.

Full functional literacy is considered achieved when literacy rates cross **95%**.

India's Literacy Landscape (PLFS 2023-24)

- Overall literacy: 80.9%
- Urban literacy: 88.9%
- Rural literacy: 77.5%
- Male literacy: 87.2%
- Female literacy: 74.6%

Despite progress, disparities exist between urban-rural and gender-wise literacy levels.

ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram (New India Literacy Programme):

- **Objective:** To improve functional literacy among adults aged 15 and above who missed formal schooling.
- **Scope:** Targets 5 crore learners by 2026-27 (1 crore per year).
- **Approach:** Uses **Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System (OTLAS)** for teaching and assessments.
- **Components:**
  - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN),
  - Critical life skills including digital and financial literacy,
  - Vocational skills,
  - Continuing education.
- **Implementation:** Through volunteerism and local community centres called **Samajik Chetna Kendras** located in schools and cultural hubs.
- **Use of Regional Languages:** Content is available in regional languages through the DIKSHA portal and ULLAS app.
- **Assessment:** Regular Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Tests (FLNAT) certify literacy.

Significance of Mizoram's Achievement:

- Demonstrates the success of targeted literacy programs and community participation.

- Sets a benchmark for other states to enhance not just literacy but **functional literacy**, crucial for real-life empowerment.
- Reflects effective use of technology and grassroots-level implementation.
- Encourages policy focus on **quality and applicability** of literacy, rather than mere basic reading and writing.

Other Key Literacy Initiatives in India:

- **National Literacy Mission (1988):** Eradication of adult illiteracy.
- **Saakshar Bharat Mission:** Targeted improvement of literacy with focus on reducing gender gap.
- **NIPUN Bharat Mission (under NEP 2020):** Aims at universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools by 2025.

Way Forward:

- **Scaling up ULLAS and similar programs** in other states to achieve full functional literacy nationwide.
- **Addressing rural-urban and gender disparities** by targeted interventions.
- **Promoting digital and financial literacy** alongside basic reading and writing for comprehensive empowerment.
- **Sustaining efforts beyond literacy** to include vocational and continuing education for lifelong learning.

Conclusion:

Mizoram's achievement in becoming fully functionally literate is a landmark in India's educational development, signaling a shift from mere literacy numbers to meaningful literacy. This aligns with the broader goals of the **National Education Policy 2020** and reflects India's commitment to empowering all citizens with the skills necessary to thrive in a knowledge-driven economy.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q **Discuss the difference between literacy and functional literacy. How does Mizoram's achievement reflect the success of India's literacy programmes?**

Q **Examine the role of technology and community participation in achieving full functional literacy in India.**

Care Economy and Digitalisation: A Gendered Shift in Economic Empowerment

Context:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the care economy has witnessed a digital transformation, opening new avenues for economic participation and social empowerment, especially for women. This shift has brought the traditionally

undervalued care work into the formal and digital economy, creating opportunities and challenges alike.

Understanding the Care Economy:

Definition (UN Women):

The care economy comprises the production and consumption of goods and services required for the physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being of people who need care—children, elderly, the ill, persons with disabilities—as well as adults in general.

Components:

- **Paid Care Work:** Jobs in caregiving professions such as nurses, domestic workers, educators, child-minders, etc.
- **Unpaid Care Work:** Domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, childcare, elder care—mainly undertaken within families, and predominantly by women.

Gendered Nature of Care Work:

- Globally, women perform **three times more** unpaid care work than men.
- In India, women do **nearly eight times** more unpaid care work than men.
- Despite its societal value, unpaid care work is excluded from GDP calculations, limiting its policy visibility and economic valuation.

Digitalisation of the Care Economy: Opportunities for Women

Reimagining Care through Technology:

The digital care economy integrates traditional caregiving with technology—via mobile apps, online service platforms, care management software, and remote monitoring tools.

Key Benefits for Women:

- **Employment Generation:**
  As per UN estimates, care infrastructure investment could generate **300 million jobs by 2035**, with **70–90%** of these benefiting women.
  Example: Platforms like **Urban Company** provide home-based services such as cleaning and cooking, becoming major employers of **female gig workers** in India.
- **Greater Autonomy and Flexibility:**
  Digital care platforms allow women to work on-demand, choose flexible schedules, and often work from home—enhancing their **agency and control over income**.

- **Skill Enhancement and Learning:**
  Many platforms offer online training and digital tools, enabling women to upskill, access wider markets, and grow professionally.
- **Enhanced Access to Services:**
  Digital platforms like **Klay** and **Broomees** (childcare), **Khyaal** and **Goodfellows** (elder care) are improving both access to caregiving and visibility of care work as a viable profession.

Challenges in the Digital Care Economy:

- **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to internet and digital devices can exclude rural or low-income women from digital opportunities.
- **Lack of Social Security:** Many women gig workers operate in informal arrangements without health insurance, maternity benefits, or job security.
- **Structural Bias:** Gender stereotypes still assign care work as "women's responsibility," which undermines its value and contributes to poor pay and job conditions.

Way Forward:

- **Gender-Responsive Digital Policies:** Ensure digital literacy, affordable access, and device ownership for women, especially in rural and underprivileged areas.
- **Formalisation and Social Protection:** Mandate social security for gig and care workers through policy support and collaboration with digital platforms.
- **Recognition of Unpaid Work:** Incorporate unpaid care work into national accounts and policy planning through time-use surveys and valuation metrics.
- **Skill Development & Digital Training:** Strengthen government schemes like **PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana** with a focus on caregiving and digital services for women.
- **Public Investment in Care Infrastructure:** Build community-based care centres, crèches, and elder care homes to reduce women's unpaid burden and boost employment.

Conclusion:

The digitalisation of the care economy holds immense promise for economic empowerment of women, while formalising an otherwise invisible sector. With supportive infrastructure, policy reforms, and inclusion measures, the care economy can become a powerful engine for **inclusive, gender-equitable growth,**

aligned with **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).**

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q What is the care economy? Examine how digitalisation of the care economy can act as a catalyst for women's empowerment in India.

Q Highlight the challenges and opportunities involved in the digital transformation of care work. Suggest policy measures to ensure inclusivity and equity in this sector.

Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2025: Insights into Human Mobility in Crisis

Context:

The **Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2025** was recently released by the **Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).** The report provides a comprehensive overview of internal displacement trends globally, caused by conflicts, violence, and disasters. India has been significantly impacted by disaster-induced displacements.

Understanding Internal Displacement:

Definition:

Internal Displacement refers to the **forced movement of people within their own country,** without crossing international borders.

- These individuals are known as **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).**
- Causes include **armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural disasters** such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and droughts.

Difference from Refugees:

- Unlike refugees, IDPs remain under the legal protection of their own government even though they are displaced from their homes.

Key Findings from GRID 2025:

- **Total IDPs at the end of 2024: 83.4 million people globally**
  - **73.5 million** displaced due to **conflict and violence**
  - **9.8 million** displaced due to **natural disasters**
- **Global Hotspots:**
  - The **United States** accounted for **25% of all disaster-related displacements**—mainly due to hurricanes, wildfires, and floods.

- Persistent conflict zones like **Sudan, Syria, DR Congo, and Ukraine** remained major contributors to conflict-induced displacement.
- **India's Status:**
  - **Conflict and violence-related internal displacements:** 1,700
  - **Disaster-related internal displacements: 5.4 million**, making India one of the most disaster-affected countries globally.
  - India is particularly vulnerable to climate-related hazards like **cyclones (Bay of Bengal & Arabian Sea), monsoon floods**, and **landslides in Himalayan regions**.

Causes of Internal Displacement in India:

1. **Natural Disasters:**
   - Frequent **floods in Assam, Bihar, Kerala**
   - **Cyclones** like Amphan, Yaas, and Biparjoy
   - **Droughts** in Maharashtra, Telangana
   - **Landslides and cloudbursts** in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh
2. **Conflict and Ethnic Tensions:**
   - Localized conflicts and ethnic violence in **Manipur, Kashmir, and Northeast India**
   - Land acquisition disputes and **development-induced displacement**
3. **Climate Change:**
   - Rising sea levels in **Sundarbans and coastal Odisha**
   - Increasing frequency of **extreme weather events**

Impact of Internal Displacement:

- **Social:** Displacement disrupts education, healthcare, and social integration. Vulnerable populations like women and children suffer the most.
- **Economic:** Livelihoods are lost, property damaged, and displaced persons often struggle with poverty and informal employment.
- **Psychological:** Mental health concerns such as trauma, anxiety, and loss of dignity due to instability and poor living conditions in camps.
- **Environmental:** IDPs in unregulated shelters can put pressure on natural resources and lead to environmental degradation.

Government Measures and Way Forward

1. Disaster Management Framework:

- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State DMAs focus on preparedness, response, and rehabilitation.

2. Climate Resilience Programs:
- Schemes like **PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission, Faster Disaster Warning Systems**, and **Climate Resilient Cities Missions**.

3. Social Protection for IDPs:
- Expanding access to **healthcare, education, ration cards**, and **temporary housing** for displaced populations.

4. Focus on Durable Solutions:
- Voluntary return, local integration, or relocation with dignity, rights, and access to livelihood.

5. Improved Data Collection:
- Establishing a **national registry of IDPs** to plan targeted interventions and ensure accountability.

Conclusion:

The GRID 2025 report underscores the growing scale and complexity of internal displacement, particularly as climate change accelerates disaster intensity. For India, this is a call to integrate displacement response within **climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and development planning**. A holistic and rights-based approach is needed to ensure the dignity, safety, and rehabilitation of displaced populations, aligning with **SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities)**, and **SDG 13 (Climate Action)**.

<u>**Model UPSC Mains Questions:**</u>

Q **What are the major drivers of internal displacement in India? Discuss with reference to the findings of the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2025.**

Q **Evaluate the impact of climate-induced disasters on internal migration in India. How can policy frameworks be strengthened to address disaster-related displacements?**

<u>One-Stop Centres for Indian Women Abroad: Strengthening Overseas Support Framework</u>

Context:

The **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** has recently received approval from the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)** to establish **nine One-Stop Centres (OSCs)** in foreign countries. These centres aim to serve as the **first**

point of contact and support for Indian women facing distress or vulnerable situations abroad.

About One-Stop Centres (OSCs) Abroad

- **Purpose:**

Provide integrated support and assistance to **Indian women in distress**—particularly those facing violence, exploitation, or legal/financial difficulties—in foreign nations.

- **Location Breakdown:**
  - **With Shelter Homes:** 7 OSCs in **Gulf countries**: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia (Jeddah & Riyadh)
  - **Without Shelter Homes:** 2 OSCs in **Toronto (Canada)** and **Singapore**
- These locations were selected based on a **high concentration of Indian diaspora** and **frequent reports of distress among migrant women**, especially domestic workers.

Role of Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF):

- **Establishment:**

Launched in **2009** by MEA to provide financial and logistical support to distressed Indian nationals abroad.

- **Eligibility:**

Based on a **means-tested** approach—assistance is provided only to those unable to afford it and who have **legally entered the host country**.

- **Scope of Support (as expanded in 2017):**
  - Temporary **boarding and lodging**
  - **Repatriation** of stranded Indians and mortal remains
  - **Legal and medical aid**
  - **Airfare support** for vulnerable individuals
- The **ICWF will fund** the operational costs of the new overseas OSCs.

About Domestic One-Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme:

- **Launched:** April 1, 2015
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)
- **Integrated into: Mission Shakti**—the umbrella scheme for women empowerment and safety
- **Objectives:**

Offer support services for women affected by any form of **gender-based violence**, including:

- Medical aid
- Legal counselling
- Psycho-social support
- Emergency shelter
- Assistance with lodging FIRs/complaints

- **Target Group:**
  All women, including **minors** (girls under 18) who are linked with institutions under **JJ Act, 2000**, and **POCSO Act, 2012**

- **Funding:**
  Fully funded through the **Nirbhaya Fund** by the Central Government

- **Administration:**
  Managed at the **district level** by the **District Collector or Magistrate**

Significance of Extending OSCs Abroad:

- **Diaspora Support:**
  Addresses the **unique vulnerabilities of Indian women migrant workers**, especially in Gulf countries where legal recourse is limited.

- **Safety Net for Women:**
  OSCs serve as a **secure refuge** offering **immediate relief, legal help, and repatriation assistance** for women trapped in exploitative domestic work or facing abuse.

- **Gender-Sensitive Diplomacy:**
  Marks a progressive step toward **gender-inclusive foreign policy** and aligns with India's vision of being **responsive to its global diaspora**.

- **Humanitarian Diplomacy:**
  Strengthens India's **soft power** by showcasing its commitment to **protect human rights and gender justice**, even beyond borders.

Way Forward:

- **Awareness Campaigns:**
  Inform Indian women migrants about OSC services through **embassies, recruitment agencies, and pre-departure training programs**.

- **Bilateral Engagements:**
  Collaborate with host countries to ensure **legal protection and cooperation** in handling cases of violence or exploitation.

- **Digital Integration:**
  Link overseas OSCs with **India's National Women's Helpline (181)** and provide **virtual counselling, legal support**, and grievance redressal.

- **Monitoring & Evaluation:**
  Periodic audits and data tracking to assess **impact and quality of services** delivered through OSCs abroad.

Conclusion:

The establishment of **One-Stop Centres for Indian women abroad** is a landmark initiative aimed at creating a **safe, dignified, and responsive support system** for the diaspora. This effort not only aligns with **India's constitutional and international obligations** on gender justice but also promotes a **holistic, rights-based approach** to foreign policy. It reflects a proactive shift in ensuring **safety, empowerment, and dignity for Indian women**, regardless of geography.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q Examine the significance of establishing One-Stop Centres abroad for Indian women. How does this reflect India's commitment to diaspora welfare and gender-sensitive foreign policy?

No Detention Policy Removed: A Shift Towards Academic Accountability in School Education

Context:

In a significant education policy shift, the **Ministry of Education** has removed the '**No Detention Policy**' for **Classes 5 and 8** through amendments to the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Rules, 2024**. The change empowers schools to hold students back based on academic performance, with provisions for remedial instruction and re-evaluation.

Background and Evolution of the No Detention Policy:

- **Origin:**
  The **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**, under **Section 16**, mandated automatic promotion for students from **Classes 1 to 8**, prohibiting detention or expulsion during this period.

- **Objective:**
  This policy aimed to:
  ○ Reduce dropout rates in elementary education
  ○ Promote universal access to schooling
  ○ Foster a stress-free, child-friendly learning environment

- **Emerging Issues:**
  Despite its intent, the policy led to unintended consequences:
  ○ Declining learning levels and grade inflation
  ○ Reduced motivation among students to perform

- - Limited teacher accountability
  - Administrative pressure to promote regardless of learning outcomes
- **2019 Amendment**:
  The **RTE (Second Amendment) Act, 2019** allowed states to reintroduce detention in Classes 5 and 8. The 2024 amendment further strengthens this by providing procedural clarity.

Key Features of the Revised Policy (2024)

- **Abolition of No Detention Rule**: Schools are now permitted to assess and **fail students in Classes 5 and 8** if they do not meet promotion criteria.
- **Provision of Remedial Education**: Students who fail will be given **special instruction** and can appear for a **re-examination within two months** of result declaration.
- **No Expulsion Guarantee**: Even if a student is detained, they **cannot be expelled** before completing **elementary education (up to Class 8)**.
- **State-Level Autonomy**: Education being a **Concurrent List** subject, the policy allows state governments to decide on implementation.
  As of **December 2024, 16 states and 2 Union Territories** (including Delhi) have adopted the revised guidelines.

About the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:

- **Constitutional Basis**: Implemented after the **86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002**, which introduced **Article 21A**, making **free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right** for children aged **6–14 years**.
- **Provisions**:
  - Free education in government schools
  - Compulsory education obligation on the state
  - 25% reservation for children from economically weaker sections (EWS) in private unaided schools
  - Prescribes minimum norms for infrastructure, pupil-teacher ratios, and teacher qualifications
  - Establishes **School Management Committees (SMCs)** to ensure accountability

Significance of the Policy Change

- **Focus on Learning Outcomes**: Reinforces **academic rigour** and the importance of mastering foundational skills before progression.

- **Boosts Accountability**: Holds both students and teachers accountable for performance, aligning with quality-oriented reforms like **NIPUN Bharat**.
- **Reduces Social Promotion Culture**: Breaks the cycle of promoting students despite lacking basic competencies, especially in literacy and numeracy.
- **Global Best Practice Alignment**: Reflects international practices where **formative and summative assessments** are both integral to the learning process.

Challenges in Implementation:

- **Risk of Increased Dropouts**: Without robust remedial support, detention could discourage students, particularly those from marginalized groups.
- **Teacher Preparedness**: Effective evaluation and re-teaching require **adequately trained and motivated teachers**.
- **Resource Constraints**: Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack the infrastructure and staff for conducting remedial classes or assessments.
- **Child Rights Concerns**: If not handled sensitively, detention could affect children's **mental well-being** and self-esteem.

Way Forward:

- **Balanced Assessment System**: Combine **Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)** with end-of-year assessments for a holistic understanding of student learning.
- **Strengthening Remedial Education**: Institutionalise remedial learning programs and integrate **EdTech solutions** for personalized support.
- **Teacher Training and Resources**: Upskill teachers in **formative assessments, pedagogy**, and **counselling**.
- **Safeguards Against Discrimination**: Ensure detention is not used arbitrarily and monitor impact on children from SC/ST, OBC, minority, and EWS backgrounds.
- **Parental and Community Engagement**: Activate **School Management Committees (SMCs)** to track student performance and promote learning support at home.

Conclusion:

The removal of the No Detention Policy is a **corrective measure** that seeks to realign India's school education system toward **quality, accountability, and outcome-based learning**. However, the success of this reform will depend on **equitable implementation**, **strengthening of remedial frameworks**, and

capacity building of educators. It must balance **rigour with compassion** to truly transform the education ecosystem.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

Q The removal of the No Detention Policy marks a shift from access to accountability in school education. Discuss the implications of this move for learning outcomes and student welfare.

Q "Detention alone cannot improve quality of education." Examine this statement in light of India's foundational literacy goals under NEP 2020.

ASER (Rural) 2024: Modest Recovery in Foundational Learning

Context:

After sharp learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024** reports a **modest recovery in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)** among children in rural India.

About ASER:

- **Full Form**: Annual Status of Education Report
- **Conducted by**: Pratham, a leading Indian NGO
- **First Launched**: 2005
- **Nature**: Citizen-led, household-based survey
- **Purpose**: To assess **schooling status** and **basic learning outcomes** (reading and arithmetic) among children aged **3–16** in rural India.

Survey Methodology:

- **Household-Based Assessment**: Unlike school-based surveys, ASER is conducted **at children's homes**, ensuring inclusion of:
  - Out-of-school children
  - Dropouts
  - Children in government, private, religious, and other school types
  - Children absent from school on the day of assessment
- **Testing Age Group**:
  - **Age 3–16**: Schooling status recorded
  - **Age 5–16**: Tested in basic reading (Class 1–2 level text) and arithmetic (number recognition, subtraction, division)
- **Alternate-Year Model** (Since 2016):
  - **Basic ASER Survey** (every 2 years in all rural districts)
  - **Focused Studies** (on other themes or age groups in gap years)

Key Findings of ASER 2024:

1. Enrollment Trends

- **Government School Enrollment**:
  - Rose from **65.6% (2018)** to **72.9% (2022)** due to COVID-induced return to free public schooling.
  - **Declined to 66.8% in 2024**, indicating a shift back toward private schooling in post-pandemic recovery.
- **Private School Enrollment**:
  - Was **18.7% in 2006**, rose steadily to **30.8% in 2014**.
  - Remains **stable around 30%**, showing sustained demand despite economic uncertainty.

2. (Further academic proficiency and gender-based insights can be added once full report data is made available.)

Significance of ASER in Indian Education Policy

- **Evidence-Based Policymaking**: ASER is a crucial **independent tool** for gauging real-time outcomes of national programs like **Samagra Shiksha**, **NIPUN Bharat**, and **NEP 2020** implementation.
- **Focus on FLN**: It highlights persistent **gaps in basic reading and arithmetic**, validating the urgent need for **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** interventions under **NIPUN Bharat**.
- **Community Engagement**: ASER's model of citizen-led assessments promotes **local awareness and accountability**.

Concerns and Challenges:

- **Learning Deficit Persistence**: Despite recovery, **learning levels remain well below pre-pandemic standards** for many children, particularly from marginalized communities.
- **Digital Divide Impact**: Children in rural areas faced significant **technology and access barriers** during school closures, deepening the learning crisis.
- **Private vs Public School Divide**: The perception of **quality differential** continues to drive migration from government to private schools, despite free education guarantees.
- **Teacher Preparedness**: Foundational skill-building remains **teacher-dependent**, but many teachers lack adequate **training in early grade pedagogy**.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen FLN Programs**: Scale up and intensify implementation of **NIPUN Bharat**, with state-specific strategies for early grades.
- **Localized Remedial Action**:Use ASER insights to launch **district-level remedial campaigns**, especially in learning-deficit zones.
- **Community and Parental Involvement**: Create **awareness campaigns** on foundational learning and build **school-community partnerships** to reinforce learning at home.
- **Bridge Digital Divide**: Invest in **low-cost digital solutions**, **teacher training**, and **local language content** to ensure inclusive access to learning tools.
- **Continuous Monitoring**: Encourage more **independent assessments** like ASER to build transparency and correct course dynamically.

Conclusion:

The **ASER 2024 findings** underscore India's gradual recovery from the pandemic-induced learning crisis. However, sustained policy attention, resource allocation, and stakeholder coordination are essential to ensure that every child achieves **foundational literacy and numeracy**—a non-negotiable stepping stone for future educational success and national development.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q **Discuss the significance of citizen-led surveys like ASER in shaping India's education policies. What are the key takeaways from the ASER 2024 report?**

Q **Foundational literacy and numeracy are critical for long-term human capital formation. In this context, assess the challenges and opportunities presented by the ASER 2024 findings.**

ASER (Rural) 2024: A Modest Recovery in Foundational Learning Post-Pandemic

Context:

The **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024**, released by **Pratham**, highlights a **modest recovery** in **foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)** levels among rural school children in India after the learning losses experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

About ASER (Annual Status of Education Report):

- **Nature:**

  ASER is India's largest **citizen-led household survey** that assesses

children's **school enrollment** and **learning outcomes** in rural areas.

- **Conducted by**: **Pratham**, an NGO, since **2005**.
- **Frequency & Format**:
    - **Annual** until 2016; now follows an **alternate-year format**:
        - Every two years: 'Basic' ASER survey covering all rural districts.
        - Intervening years: Focused surveys on specific themes or age groups.
- **Methodology**:
    - **Household-based survey**, not school-based.
    - Captures data of all children aged 3–16, including:
        - Out-of-school children.
        - Children in private, public, religious, or alternative schooling systems.
        - Children absent on the assessment day.
- **Learning Metrics**:
    - Reading (ability to read a Class 2 level text).
    - Arithmetic (basic subtraction and division tasks).

Key Highlights of ASER 2024:

1. Enrollment Trends

- **Government Schools**:
    - 2018: **65.6%**
    - 2022: **72.9%** (pandemic-driven spike)
    - 2024: Declined again to **66.8%**
- **Private Schools**:
    - Gradual increase from **18.7%** (2006) to **30.8%** (2014).
    - Since then, remained relatively stable at ~**30%**, even post-pandemic.

2. Foundational Learning Recovery

- **Reading and Math skills**, which saw a significant drop during COVID-19, have shown **modest improvement**, although **pre-pandemic levels are yet to be fully restored**.
- Some states like **Kerala, Himachal Pradesh**, and **Punjab** show better recovery trajectories.

3. Digital Learning Divide

- Increased reliance on **digital tools** during COVID created **learning gaps** based on device access, parental education, and geographic location.
- ASER 2024 highlights ongoing disparities in **access to home learning support**.

Significance of ASER 2024 Findings:

- **Reality Check**: Offers independent, ground-level data often missing in official records.
- **Foundation for Policy**: Data supports government programs like:
  - **NIPUN Bharat** (FLN Mission)
  - **NEP 2020** goals of early learning
- **Focus on Rural Education**: Identifies urgent needs in India's most underserved areas.
- **Citizen Participation**: Demonstrates the power of **community-driven accountability** in education.

Concerns and Challenges:

- **Persistent Learning Gaps**: Post-pandemic gains are **uneven** across regions, gender, and income levels.
- **Low Numeracy Proficiency**: Arithmetic recovery has been slower than literacy, especially for higher-level tasks.
- **Quality vs. Access**: Increased enrollment does not always translate to better learning outcomes.
- **Teacher Capacity**: Need for FLN-focused **teacher training** and remedial programs.
- **Digital Inequality**: Urban-rural and gender-based digital divides continue to affect remote learning access.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen FLN Mission**: Fast-track implementation of **NIPUN Bharat** with state-specific strategies.
- **Community Learning Initiatives**: Mobilise **local volunteers, libraries, and NGOs** to support catch-up learning.
- **Parental Engagement**: Build **literacy-friendly home environments**, especially in rural areas.
- **Data-Driven Interventions**: Use ASER findings to design **targeted remedial programs**.

- **Bridge Digital Gaps**: Promote affordable, inclusive **EdTech platforms** with offline capabilities.

Conclusion:

ASER 2024 offers encouraging signs of **educational recovery** post-COVID but also serves as a **cautionary reminder** of India's long-standing learning crisis. A **holistic, equitable and community-rooted approach** is needed to sustain these gains and achieve the vision of **universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2026–27**, as outlined in NEP 2020.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q The ASER 2024 report highlights a modest recovery in foundational learning in rural India. Discuss its implications for the success of NIPUN Bharat and NEP 2020 goals.

Q Despite increased enrollment, foundational learning outcomes remain poor in rural India. Analyse the causes and suggest remedial strategies based on ASER data.

TIME USE SURVEY (TUS) 2024

Context:

The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** has released the **Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024**, offering valuable insights into how Indians allocate time across paid work, unpaid domestic duties, caregiving, education, and leisure. The data reveals **gender disparities** and trends in workforce participation, caregiving, and household labor.

About Time Use Survey (TUS):

- **Conducted by**: **National Statistical Office (NSO)** under MoSPI.
- **Timeline**: First all-India TUS in **2019**, second in **2024**.
- **Coverage**: January–December 2024 across all states and UTs.
- **Objective**:

  To **capture participation and time spent** by men and women in:
  - Paid work
  - Unpaid domestic and caregiving work
  - Learning, social, and leisure activities
- **Significance**:
  - Recognizes **unpaid labor**, especially that of women.
  - Helps estimate **economic contribution** of caregiving and household duties.

- ○ Informs **gender-sensitive policymaking**, especially for labor reforms and social protection.
- **International Context**: India joins a small group of countries (e.g., **USA, Japan, Australia**) that conduct **national time use surveys** regularly.

Key Findings of TUS 2024:

1. Workforce Participation

- **Women**: Participation in employment-related activities rose from **21.8% (2019)** to **25% (2024)**.
- **Men**: Increased from **70.9% to 75%**.
- **Gap**: Despite improvement, a **large gender gap** persists in paid employment.

2. Unpaid Domestic Work

- **Women**: Time spent declined slightly to **305 minutes/day** from **315 mins/day (2019)**.
- **Men**: Increased marginally to **88 minutes/day**.
- **Gap**: Women still spend ~**3.5 times more** time on unpaid domestic chores than men.

3. Caregiving

- **Participation**:
  - ○ Women (15–59): **41%**
  - ○ Men (15–59): **21.4%**
- **Time Spent**:
  - ○ Women: **137 mins/day**
  - ○ Men: **75 mins/day**

4. Leisure & Cultural Activities

- People (age 6+): Spent **171 mins/day** on leisure/media.
  - ○ Men: **177 mins/day**
  - ○ Women: **164 mins/day**

5. Education

- **Children (6–14)**:
  - ○ **89.3%** engaged in learning activities.
  - ○ Average time spent: **413 mins/day** (nearly 7 hours).

Analysis & Significance:

Gender Inequality in Work Distribution:

- Women bear **disproportionate burden** of unpaid domestic and care work, restricting their economic participation.

- Persistent undervaluation of care economy despite significant time investment.

Economic Implications:

- **Unpaid labor** (especially by women) remains **invisible** in national accounting (GDP), despite contributing to family and societal well-being.
- Accurate time-use data helps in **redefining economic productivity** and supports advocacy for **universal social security, minimum wage**, and **care credits**.

Progress in Women's Participation:

- Rise in female labor participation (from 21.8% to 25%) is a **positive trend**, possibly driven by **gig economy, hybrid work models**, and **digital platforms**.

Education & Learning Trends:

- High daily learning time reflects **parental and institutional investment** in education for children aged 6–14.
- Insights useful for evaluating programs under **Samagra Shiksha, NEP 2020**, and **digital learning inclusion**.

Challenges:

- **Persistent time poverty** for women.
- **Digital, cultural, and occupational barriers** limiting women's paid work.
- **Informality and lack of social protection** in women's workspaces.
- **Underrepresentation of caregiving in economic policy**.

Way Forward:

- Recognize **care economy** as productive work in policymaking.
- Invest in **infrastructure for childcare, elderly care**, and **community services**.
- Promote **shared household responsibilities** through awareness and education.
- Incorporate TUS data into **labour, welfare, and budgeting frameworks**.
- Strengthen **gender budgeting** using time-use analytics.

Conclusion:

The **Time Use Survey 2024** provides a **critical lens** into the **gendered dynamics of labor** in India. It underlines the need for **policy shifts** that go beyond paid work and address **unpaid domestic and care work**, which sustains families and communities. Recognizing and redistributing this burden is essential for **inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development**.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q Despite rising participation in paid employment, women in India continue to bear the brunt of unpaid care work. Critically analyse this paradox in light of the Time Use Survey 2024.

Q Do you think the inclusion of unpaid labor in GDP estimation would significantly alter our understanding of national productivity? Substantiate your answer with reference to Time Use Surveys.

FENTANYL: SYNTHETIC OPIOID UNDER GLOBAL SCRUTINY

Context:

Indian security agencies are intensifying surveillance on **fentanyl trafficking routes**, especially amid rising concerns over synthetic opioid abuse in **North America**. Reports indicate a significant influx of illicit fentanyl into the **United States via Canada**, triggering international alarm over its public health and security implications.

What is Fentanyl?

- **Fentanyl** is a **synthetic opioid** developed for **pain management and anesthesia**, particularly in **cancer and post-surgical patients**.
- It is **approximately 100 times stronger than morphine** and **50 times stronger than heroin**, making even small doses potentially **lethal** if misused.
- Available in medical settings as **patches, lozenges, or injectables**, fentanyl is often **illegally synthesized and trafficked**, posing major health risks.

Understanding Opioids:

- **Opioids** are a class of **narcotic drugs** that act on opioid receptors in the brain to relieve pain.
- They are categorized as:
  - **Prescription opioids**: Morphine, oxycodone, codeine.
  - **Illicit opioids**: Heroin and illegally manufactured fentanyl.
- Opioids induce **euphoria**, making them prone to **abuse and addiction**.

Dangers of Fentanyl Overdose:

Fentanyl-related overdoses are among the **leading causes of drug-related deaths** in North America.

Symptoms include:

- **Stupor** or near-unconsciousness
- **Constricted or dilated pupils**
- **Clammy skin and cyanosis** (bluish tint due to oxygen deprivation)

- **Respiratory depression**, **coma**, and **death** in severe cases

Naloxone, an opioid antagonist, is often used in emergencies to **reverse fentanyl overdose**.

India's Legal and Regulatory Framework:

- **Fentanyl** is listed as a **controlled substance** under the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985**.
- Strict **licensing requirements** are imposed on its **manufacture, possession, transportation, and sale**.
- The **Pharmaceutical sector** must comply with **recordkeeping and storage regulations** to prevent diversion for illicit purposes.

Global Regulatory Mechanisms:

- **UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961**: Establishes a global framework to control narcotic drugs.
- **UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971**: Expands control to synthetic substances, including fentanyl and its analogs.
- **International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)** and **UNODC** play key roles in monitoring global opioid supply chains and ensuring balance between **medical need** and **abuse prevention**.

Why is Fentanyl a Global Concern?

1. **Transnational Crime**: Illicit fentanyl is often produced in clandestine labs and trafficked through global networks, including **online dark markets** and **postal systems**.
2. **Public Health Emergency**: The **United States and Canada** are witnessing a synthetic opioid crisis. In the U.S., **over 70,000 deaths annually** are linked to fentanyl and its analogs.
3. **India's Role**:
   - Although not a major consumer of fentanyl, India is a **large producer of precursor chemicals**.
   - Rising concern over **India-based networks** being exploited for **global distribution**, prompting close monitoring.
4. **Challenge of Analogues**: Fentanyl analogs (like carfentanil) are often chemically tweaked to **evade detection** and **bypass regulation**—making enforcement harder.

Challenges:

- Difficulty in detecting and regulating **synthetic analogues**.
- Risk of **diversion** from pharmaceutical supply chains.

- Limited **forensic and real-time tracking capacity**.
- Poor **public awareness** on synthetic opioid risks.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen border surveillance** and forensic capacity.
- Tighten regulation on **precursor chemicals** like NPP and ANPP.
- Enhance international cooperation via **Interpol, INCB, UNODC**.
- Promote public education and **safe medical opioid use**.
- Expand access to **treatment, rehabilitation, and Naloxone** in high-risk areas.

Conclusion:

Fentanyl represents a **modern narcotic challenge**, combining the lethality of traditional opioids with the elusiveness of synthetic drugs. For India, the emerging threat lies in its role as a **potential hub for chemical production and trafficking**. Effective legal frameworks, **international cooperation**, and **strong public health responses** are essential to tackle the synthetic opioid menace.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

Q **What is fentanyl, and why is it emerging as a major threat to global public health and security? Evaluate India's preparedness in this context.**

Q **Synthetic opioids like fentanyl pose challenges distinct from traditional narcotics. Discuss how regulatory and enforcement mechanisms must evolve to tackle these emerging threats.**

Q **"The global fentanyl crisis underscores the need for a public health–based approach to drug control." Examine this statement with reference to recent trends.**

CANCER SCREENING AT AYUSHMAN CENTRES: CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Context:

A recent report highlights a serious **implementation gap** in **cancer screening services** at **Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)**. Despite their mandate to provide **annual screening for oral, breast, and cervical cancer** for individuals aged **30 years and above, less than 10%** have undergone even a single round of screening.

India's Cancer Burden and Screening Imperative:

- India witnesses over **13 lakh new cancer cases annually**, with late diagnosis being a key driver of mortality.

- **Oral, breast, and cervical cancers** are among the **most prevalent** and **preventable** forms of cancer in India.
- **Early detection** through **population-level screening** is essential to improve treatment outcomes and reduce costs.

Key Initiatives Related to Cancer Control in India:

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS):

- Launched in **2010**, aims to:
  - Strengthen **infrastructure** for NCD care
  - Build **human resource capacity**
  - Promote **health education**, early **diagnosis**, and timely **referral**

National Cancer Grid (NCG):

- Established in **2012**, the Grid is a collaborative network of:
  - Cancer hospitals, research institutions, patient groups, and NGOs.
  - Aims to **standardize cancer care** and improve **access to affordable treatment**.

HPV Vaccine Programme:

- **HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccine** helps prevent **cervical cancer**.
- Most effective when administered to **girls aged 9–26 years**.
- Key to achieving WHO's cervical cancer **elimination targets**.

Awareness Campaigns:

- **National Cancer Awareness Day** (November 7) and **World Cancer Day** (February 4) aim to improve **public awareness** about cancer prevention and early detection.

About Ayushman Bharat Scheme:

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY):

- **Launched in 2018**, it provides:
  - **Health insurance of ₹5 lakh per family per year** for over **10 crore poor and vulnerable families**.
  - **Covers nearly 2,000 medical and surgical procedures**, including cancer treatment.
  - Implemented via **PPP models**: trust-based, insurance-based, or hybrid.
  - Features:
    - **Portability** across states
    - **Public dashboard** for real-time tracking

- **Anti-Fraud Mechanisms** through **NAFU** and state units

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (earlier Health and Wellness Centres – HWCs):
- Target: **1.5 lakh AB-HWCs** across India
- Aim: Deliver **Comprehensive Primary Health Care**, close to communities.
- Services:
  - Free annual screening for **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** like:
    - **Hypertension**
    - **Diabetes**
    - **Oral, Breast, and Cervical Cancers**

Challenges in Cancer Screening at AB-HWCs:

1. Low Coverage
- Less than **10% of the target population** has undergone cancer screening at AB-HWCs.

2. Human Resource Constraints
- **Lack of trained personnel**, especially for **visual inspection** and **follow-up procedures**.

3. Poor Infrastructure
- Inadequate availability of **screening equipment** and **cold-chain facilities** for HPV vaccines.

4. Lack of Community Awareness
- Low public awareness and social taboos around **breast and cervical cancer** inhibit participation.

5. Weak Referral Linkages
- Absence of **clear protocols** for referral and further diagnosis when positive cases are detected.

Way Forward:

1. Strengthen Primary Care Workforce
- Train frontline workers like **ANMs, ASHAs, CHOs** in cancer screening protocols.

2. Ensure Screening Infrastructure
- Equip AB-HWCs with **mammography referral links**, **oral inspection tools**, and **HPV kits**.

3. Use Digital Tools for Tracking

- Leverage **electronic health records** and **ABHA IDs** for real-time tracking of screening and follow-up.

4. Community Engagement

- Launch **IEC campaigns** and involve **local influencers** to destigmatize cancer screening.

5. Strengthen Referral and Tertiary Linkages

- Improve connectivity between **HWCs, District Hospitals, and Cancer Centres** through **hub-and-spoke models**.

Conclusion:

The underperformance of cancer screening at AB-HWCs points to a critical gap between **policy vision and ground-level implementation**. To achieve universal health coverage, India must prioritize **robust screening mechanisms**, especially for preventable cancers, at the **primary healthcare level**. With rising NCD burden, this is both a **public health imperative** and a **socioeconomic necessity**.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

Q Critically examine the role of Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres in the early detection of non-communicable diseases like cancer.

Q "Early detection is the key to successful cancer management in low- and middle-income countries like India." In light of this statement, evaluate the performance of cancer screening programmes in India.

NATIONAL HEALTH CLAIM EXCHANGE (NHCX)

Context:

The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** and the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)** are jointly implementing the **National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX)** to create a **standardized and paperless health insurance claim ecosystem** in India.

Background:

India's health insurance sector has long suffered from:

- Fragmented **claims processing** systems,
- Delayed **cashless settlements**,
- Operational inefficiencies due to **multiple hospital portals**, and
- **Lack of interoperability** between insurance companies, hospitals, and third-party administrators (TPAs).

In this context, the **National Health Claim Exchange** aims to serve as a **single digital interface** for transparent, fast, and secure health insurance claim

processing — aligned with **Digital India** and the goal of **"Insurance for All by 2047"**.

What is the National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX)?

The NHCX is an **open-standard communication protocol** designed to enable **seamless digital exchange** of health insurance claim information between:

- **Payers** (insurance companies and TPAs),
- **Providers** (hospitals and clinics),
- **Beneficiaries** (insured individuals),
- And **Regulatory Entities**.

Key Features of NHCX:

- **Paperless Claims:** Entire claim lifecycle — from pre-authorization to final settlement — is digitized and standardized.
- **Faster Processing:** Mandates a **3-hour timeline** for **cashless claim processing** post discharge authorization.
- **Single Window Interface:** Eliminates the need for hospitals to log into multiple insurance portals for different insurers.
- **Incentives for Digital Adoption:** Under the **Digital Health Incentive Scheme (DHIS)** by the **National Health Authority (NHA)**:
  - Hospitals receive ₹500 or **10% of the claim amount** per insurance claim processed via NHCX.
- **Secure Transactions:** Ensures **data privacy, encryption**, and compliance with **NDHM (National Digital Health Mission)** protocols.
- **Wide Integration:** As of **July 21, 2024, 34 insurance companies and TPAs** are integrated with NHCX.

About IRDAI (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India):

- **Established:** 1999, via IRDA Act, 1999
- **Regulatory Role:** Supervises insurance sector, ensures customer protection, promotes fair practices
- **Structure:** 10-member body — 1 Chairman, 5 full-time, and 4 part-time members
- **HQ:** Hyderabad, Telangana
- **Vision:** "Insurance for All by 2047"

Significance of NHCX:

Dimension	Impact
Efficiency	Reduces claim turnaround time and manual processing errors
Transparency	Standardizes documentation and communication among stakeholders
Affordability	Reduces administrative costs for hospitals and insurers
Policyholder Convenience	Ensures seamless and faster access to cashless healthcare
Digital Health Ecosystem	Aligns with National Digital Health Mission & Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission
Financial Inclusion	Promotes health insurance penetration, especially among the poor

Challenges Ahead:

- Low digital readiness in **Tier-2 and Tier-3 hospitals**
- Need for **capacity building and training** of hospital staff
- Ensuring **data privacy and cybersecurity**
- Integrating smaller **regional insurers and non-network hospitals**

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q The National Health Claim Exchange (NHCX) is a step toward building a unified digital health ecosystem in India. Critically examine its features and potential impact.

Q How can digital health initiatives such as NHCX and DHIS help achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047'? Evaluate.

SHOULD EDUCATION BE BROUGHT BACK ON THE STATE LIST?

Context:

Recent controversies surrounding the **NEET-UG examination**, administrative challenges, and growing centralization of education have reignited the debate on whether **education should be shifted back from the Concurrent List to the State List**. Critics argue this would restore federal balance and improve responsiveness to local needs.

Period/Amendment	Status of Education	Key Highlights
Government of India Act, 1935	Provincial List	Education was managed by provinces under colonial rule
Post-Independence (1950 Constitution)	State List (Entry 11)	Education was the exclusive domain of the States
Swaran Singh Committee (1976)	Recommended Concurrent List	Advocated national uniformity in education policy
42nd Amendment Act, 1976	Shifted to Concurrent List (Entry 25)	Enabled both Union and State governments to legislate on education
44th Amendment Attempt (1978)	Failed reversal	Janata government attempted to restore it to State List; failed in Rajya Sabha
Current Status	Concurrent List	Both Centre and States can legislate on education

Constitutional & Historical Background:

Concurrent List (Entry 25): Significance and Challenges

Advantages of Central Role:

- Ensures **national standards**, quality, and uniformity.
- Facilitates flagship schemes like **Samagra Shiksha, National Curriculum Framework, NEP 2020**.
- Helps regulate **national-level exams** (NEET, JEE, CUET).

Challenges:

- Leads to **one-size-fits-all** policies, often ignoring regional needs.
- Weakens **state autonomy** over curriculum, language, and pedagogy.
- Centralization has caused friction over **admissions, reservations**, and syllabus.

Key Arguments for Bringing Education Back to State List:

Argument	Explanation
Federal Principle	Education reflects cultural and linguistic diversity; better managed locally.
Context-Specific Needs	States can tailor curriculum and pedagogy based on regional development levels.

Administrative Flexibility	States can manage exams, recruit teachers, and allocate resources more efficiently.
Reduce Central Overreach	Recent NEET and CUET controversies suggest overcentralization can backfire.
Constitutional Morality	Strengthening cooperative federalism aligns with the spirit of the Constitution.

About the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:

- **Implements Article 21A**: Mandates **free and compulsory education for 6–14-year-olds**.
- Mandates:
  - Age-appropriate enrollment,
  - Student-teacher ratio norms,
  - Ban on private tuition by teachers,
  - **25% reservation** in private schools for disadvantaged groups.
- **Shared responsibility**: Both Centre and States finance RTE implementation.
- Creation of **School Management Committees (SMC)** for transparency and participatory planning.

Key Issues in Current Framework:

- Central bodies like **NTA (National Testing Agency)** have been criticized for opaque conduct of entrance exams.
- **Language bias** in national tests affects students from non-Hindi states.
- Uneven **capacity building** in states creates dependency on centrally framed norms.

Possible Solutions (Middle Path):

- Strengthen **cooperative federalism** in education policymaking.
- Grant states more say in curriculum design under **NEP 2020**.
- Promote **decentralized assessments**, regional languages, and local content.
- Reform central testing bodies like **NTA** for better accountability.

Way Forward:

The issue is **not about choosing central vs. state**, but **redefining the balance of responsibilities**. India's diverse socio-cultural context demands a **bottom-up approach in curriculum and assessment**, while ensuring **minimum national standards**. The goal should be to strengthen the federal character without compromising quality or equity in education.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q Should education be moved back to the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution? Critically analyze in light of recent controversies in national-level examinations. (GS Paper II – Polity & Governance)

Q "Centralization of education policy is undermining India's linguistic and cultural diversity." Do you agree? Suggest reforms to strike a balance between national standards and regional autonomy.

GOVT'S U-WIN PORTAL TO REDRAW IMMUNIZATION MAP

Context:

The Government of India is set to **launch the U-WIN portal on August 15, 2025**, to digitize the entire vaccination record-keeping system. This initiative aims to modernize **maternal and child health services** by replacing the current paper-based vaccination tracking done by **ASHA and ANM workers**. U-WIN is poised to become the digital backbone of India's immunization infrastructure.

Universal Immunization Programme (UIP): An Overview

The **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)** is among the **largest public health initiatives globally**, launched in **1985** to protect mothers and children from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Key Features:

- **Target Population**:
  - ~2.67 crore newborns and
  - ~2.9 crore pregnant women annually.
- **Objective**: Reduce mortality and morbidity due to vaccine-preventable diseases.
- **Eligibility**: A child is considered **fully immunized** if all recommended vaccines are administered in the **first year** of life.

Vaccines Provided:

Level	Vaccines Covered
National	Diphtheria, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, Meningitis & Pneumonia (Hib)
Sub-National	Rotavirus Diarrhea, Pneumococcal Pneumonia, Japanese Encephalitis (in endemic regions)

Major Milestones:

- **Polio elimination**: India declared polio-free in 2014.
- **Maternal & neonatal tetanus elimination**: Achieved in 2015.

Mission Indradhanush: Strengthening UIP

To bridge immunization gaps, **Mission Indradhanush (MI)** was launched in **2014** with the aim of achieving **90% full immunization coverage**.

Implementation

- Covered **554 districts** across 6 phases.
- Focused on **underserved, hard-to-reach, and low-coverage regions**.
- Aligned with flagship initiatives like:
  - **Gram Swaraj Abhiyan** (16,850 villages),
  - **Extended Gram Swaraj Abhiyan** (48,929 villages in 117 aspirational districts).

Impact:

- 1st two phases increased full immunization by **6.7% in a year**.
- **Intensified MI** (Phase 5): 18.5% increase in immunization coverage (NFHS-4 baseline).

U-WIN Portal: A Digital Revolution in Immunization

What is U-WIN?

- A digital **end-to-end platform** to manage immunization records, much like **CoWIN** was for COVID-19 vaccination.
- **Key Stakeholders**: ANMs, ASHA workers, families, health officials, and policymakers.
- Will **digitally track immunization status**, send reminders, and provide **centralized data access**.

Key Features:

- Replaces **manual documentation** by health workers.
- Ensures **real-time tracking** of pregnant women and children.
- Enables **digital health cards**, which can be integrated with **ABHA IDs** (Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Account).

Potential Benefits:

- Enhances **transparency** and **accountability** in immunization delivery.
- Reduces **missed vaccinations** and **duplication**.
- Boosts **e-governance** in public health.

Challenges in Immunization Landscape:

- **Manual record-keeping** often leads to data loss and duplication.
- **Inter-state migration** affects tracking of immunization status.
- Low **health literacy** in rural areas hampers awareness and compliance.
- **Vaccine hesitancy** in some communities due to misinformation.

Way Forward:

- Ensure **training** for frontline workers (ASHA/ANM) on U-WIN.
- Promote **community engagement and awareness** campaigns.
- Integrate with broader **Digital Health Mission** and **ABHA IDs.**
- Strengthen **interoperability** with existing databases like RCH and HMIS.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q **Digital transformation in health services is essential for efficient last-mile delivery. Discuss the role of the U-WIN platform in strengthening India's immunization strategy. (GS Paper II – Governance/Health)**

Q **Mission Indradhanush has played a vital role in improving immunization coverage in India. Critically examine its achievements and limitations.**

NEW INDIA LITERACY PROGRAMME (NILP)

Context:

To enhance **adult literacy in India**, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a formal **definition of "literacy"** and criteria for achieving **"full literacy"** under the **New India Literacy Programme (NILP).** This aligns with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which emphasizes **universal foundational literacy and lifelong learning.**

What Is Literacy According to NILP?

- **Literacy:** Defined as the **ability to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic** with comprehension. It also includes **essential life skills** like:
  - **Digital literacy**
  - **Financial literacy**
  - **Civic awareness**
  - **Health and environmental literacy**
- Full Literacy: A **State or UT is considered fully literate** when it achieves **a 95% literacy rate.**
- Certification Criteria: Individuals must pass the **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)** to be officially recognized as literate under NILP.

About the NILP (ULLAS):

- **Full Name**: ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saksharta Karyakram (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society)
- **Type: Centrally Sponsored Scheme**
- **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Education**

- **Time Frame**: 2022–2027
- **Budget**: ₹1037.90 crore
  - ₹700 crore: Central share
  - ₹337.90 crore: State share

Objectives:

- To empower **non-literate adults (15 years and above)** with basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills.
- To facilitate **lifelong learning and integration** of these individuals into mainstream society and economy.
- Support **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and NEP 2020 objectives of inclusive education.

Key Components:

Component	Description
Foundational Literacy & Numeracy (FLN)	Basic reading, writing, and arithmetic
Critical Life Skills	Digital literacy, financial literacy, legal literacy, disaster management
Vocational Skills Development	Linkages with Skill India Mission and NSDC for job-readiness
Basic Education	Up to Class 8 equivalent certification
Continuing Education	Libraries, reading rooms, Samajik Chetna Kendras for lifelong learning

Implementation Model:

Volunteer-Based Model:

- Community volunteers register through a **dedicated mobile app**.
- Peer-learning and mentorship are encouraged.

Tech-Driven Delivery:

- **DIKSHA Platform**: Hosts learning resources for foundational learning.
- **Mobile App**: Both volunteers and beneficiaries can register and access materials.
- **Multi-Platform Outreach**: Uses **TV, radio**, and **Samajik Chetna Kendra** community centers for broader access.

Identification of Beneficiaries:

- **Door-to-door surveys** conducted using mobile applications.
- Non-literate adults can **self-register** through mobile apps.

Challenges in Adult Literacy:

- **Cultural and social stigma** attached to adult learning.
- Limited **digital access** and **smartphone penetration** among the poorest.
- **Dropout and attendance issues** due to work and family obligations.
- **Urban-rural divide** in volunteer availability and digital infrastructure.

Suggestions & Way Forward:

- **Incentivize volunteer participation** with certificates, honorariums, or career-linked credits.
- Ensure **offline accessibility** of learning materials in remote areas.
- Partner with **CSR initiatives** and local bodies for infrastructure and outreach.
- Track literacy progress through **regular FLNAT cycles and geo-tagged dashboards**.
- Strengthen **convergence** with schemes like Digital India, PMGDISHA, and Skill India.

Model UPSC Mains Questions:

Q **Discuss the role of the New India Literacy Programme (NILP) in achieving inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for adults in India. What challenges does it face, and how can they be addressed? (GS-II – Governance, Education)**

Q **In the context of India's socio-economic diversity, critically analyze the potential of NILP to bridge the digital and educational divide.**

New India Literacy Programme (NILP)

Context:

To enhance adult literacy efforts in India, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a directive to states defining the criteria for literacy and full literacy. This move aligns with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and aims to bring clarity to the implementation of the New India Literacy Programme (NILP), also known as ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society).

Key Definitions

- **Literacy:** The Ministry of Education defines literacy as the ability to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic operations with comprehension. It also includes essential life skills such as digital and financial literacy.
- **Full Literacy:** A State or Union Territory is considered fully literate when it achieves a literacy rate of 95 percent.

- **Literate Person under NILP**: An individual is considered literate under NILP after passing the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT).

About the NILP:

- Launched by the Ministry of Education, the New India Literacy Programme is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- It is being implemented from 2022 to 2027, with a total outlay of ₹1037.90 crore, of which ₹700 crore is the central share and ₹337.90 crore is the state share.
- The programme is part of NEP 2020's vision to ensure equitable and inclusive education for all, particularly for adults who missed formal schooling.

Objectives:

- To provide foundational literacy and numeracy to adults aged 15 years and above who are currently non-literate.
- To equip adults with critical life skills and help them integrate into society.
- To promote lifelong learning and awareness among citizens.

Key Components:

1. **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy**: Focuses on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic.
2. **Critical Life Skills**: Includes digital literacy, financial literacy, legal literacy, and environmental awareness.
3. **Basic Education**: Provides equivalency to formal school levels up to Classes 3, 5, and 8.
4. **Vocational Skills Development**: Offers employment-oriented training.
5. **Continuing Education**: Includes activities such as library management, book clubs, and community learning centers.

Beneficiaries:

- Adults aged 15 and above who have missed out on formal education.
- Beneficiaries are identified through door-to-door surveys conducted by state-appointed volunteers.
- Individuals can also self-register using a mobile application.

Implementation Strategy:

- The programme adopts a volunteer-based model, allowing citizens to register and contribute as educators.

- The scheme is technology-driven, with learning materials hosted on the NCERT's DIKSHA platform.
- Educational content is also disseminated via television, radio, and Samajik Chetna Kendras to reach underserved communities.

Significance:

- Enhances access to education among marginalized and disadvantaged communities.
- Promotes digital and financial inclusion in rural and remote areas.
- Contributes to India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4.6) by ensuring adult literacy and numeracy.
- Empowers women, especially in regions with gender-based literacy gaps.

Challenges:

- Lack of access to digital infrastructure in rural and tribal areas.
- Ensuring consistent engagement of adult learners who may face time or economic constraints.
- Retention and training of volunteers.
- Variability in state-level implementation and assessment quality.

Way Forward:

- Strengthening public-private partnerships for better resource mobilization.
- Providing incentives to both learners and volunteers.
- Promoting multilingual and context-specific content.
- Leveraging local governance bodies to improve outreach and monitoring.

Model UPSC Questions:

Mains (GS Paper II – Governance/Education)

Q "Adult literacy is key to inclusive development." In the light of this statement, discuss the objectives and challenges of the New India Literacy Programme (NILP).

Q Examine the role of digital platforms in bridging literacy gaps in India. How does the NILP utilize technology to promote adult education?

Euthanasia

Context:

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the Draft Guidelines for the Withdrawal of Life Support in Terminally Ill Patients. This is a significant step in formalizing the legal and ethical framework related to end-of-life care in India, where such procedures have largely operated in a legal grey zone.

What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia refers to the deliberate act of ending a person's life to relieve them from incurable suffering, usually in the context of terminal illness. The primary intent is to ensure a peaceful and dignified death rather than allowing the individual to endure prolonged pain or distress.

Types of Euthanasia

- **Active Euthanasia**: This involves direct action to end a patient's life, such as administering a lethal drug or injection. **Example:** A doctor intentionally gives a terminally ill patient a fatal dose of medication at the patient's request.

  Status in India: Active euthanasia is **illegal** in India.

- **Passive Euthanasia**:

  This involves withdrawing or withholding medical treatment that prolongs life, thereby allowing the patient to die naturally.

  Example: Turning off a life-support system or discontinuing feeding and hydration in a patient who has no hope of recovery.

  Status in India: Passive euthanasia is **legal**, following the Supreme Court's recognition in 2018.

Legal Position in India:

- **Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011)**: The Supreme Court first allowed passive euthanasia in exceptional cases under strict guidelines, emphasizing that the decision should be taken by a high court with medical board approval.

- **Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018)**: The Supreme Court recognized the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. It legalized passive euthanasia and also validated the concept of Advance Medical Directives (living wills), allowing patients to refuse treatment in case of terminal illness.

- **Advance Medical Directive (Living Will)**: A legal document through which a person can express their wishes about future medical treatment if they become incapacitated.

- **Recent Development**: The draft guidelines released by the Health Ministry aim to streamline the process of life support withdrawal and create a standardized legal protocol to avoid ambiguity in end-of-life decisions.

Ethical and Social Dimensions:

- **Arguments in Favor:**
  - Upholds individual autonomy and dignity.

- ○ Reduces prolonged suffering.
- ○ Allows medical resources to be used where they are more needed.
- **Arguments Against**:
  - ○ Can be misused, especially against vulnerable patients.
  - ○ Conflicts with the medical ethics of preserving life.
  - ○ Religious and cultural opposition to the concept of "assisted death".

Global Scenario:

- Countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and some U.S. states (like Oregon) allow various forms of euthanasia or assisted suicide under regulated conditions.

Model UPSC Questions:

Mains (GS Paper II – Polity and Governance / GS Paper IV – Ethics)

Q "Right to die with dignity is an extension of the right to life under Article 21." Discuss this in the context of passive euthanasia in India.

Q Evaluate the ethical concerns associated with the legalization of euthanasia. How does India strike a balance between compassion and misuse prevention?

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012

Context:

The Supreme Court of India recently reaffirmed that the **possession, circulation, or consumption of sexually explicit material involving minors** constitutes a serious offence under the POCSO Act, emphasizing the need for stricter enforcement in digital spaces.

Background & Need for the Act:

India had no specific legislation addressing the various forms of child sexual abuse prior to 2012. Offences against children were earlier prosecuted under general provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which were often inadequate and non-comprehensive.

In response to increasing cases of child sexual exploitation and to fulfill international obligations under the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the Parliament enacted the **POCSO Act in 2012**, providing a structured and sensitive framework to deal with such offences.

Salient Features of the POCSO Act, 2012:

- **Comprehensive Coverage:** The Act covers a wide range of offences including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and child pornography.

- **Gender-Neutral Provisions:** The law defines a "child" as **any individual below the age of 18 years**, regardless of gender, ensuring protection for both boys and girls.
- **Child-Friendly Procedures:**
  - Special Courts are set up for child sexual offence cases to ensure **speedy and child-sensitive trials**.
  - Victim statements are to be recorded in a non-threatening environment.
  - Police officials are to wear plain clothes and not uniforms during investigations.
  - The child should not be exposed to the accused at any point during the investigation.
- **Mandatory Reporting of Offences:** Any individual (especially professionals in charge of institutions) who fails to report a suspected offence may be punished with imprisonment and/or fine.
- **Confidentiality Clause:** The identity of the child victim cannot be disclosed by media or any individual, except with permission from the Special Court, to protect the dignity and privacy of the victim.
- **No Statute of Limitations:** A complaint can be filed **at any time**, even if years have passed since the incident occurred.

Amendments & Judicial Developments:

- **2019 Amendment:**
  - Introduced stricter punishments, including **death penalty** for aggravated penetrative sexual assault.
  - Increased penalties for child pornography.
  - Emphasized digital offences involving explicit materials.
- **Supreme Court on Digital Content (2024 Ruling):** The Court underscored that the **mere consumption** of child pornographic material amounts to a criminal offence, extending the ambit of enforcement to online spaces, aligning with global norms on cyber safety and child rights.

Implementation Challenges:

- Underreporting due to social stigma and fear.
- Low conviction rates despite increasing number of cases.
- Delays in investigation and judicial processes.
- Need for better sensitization of police and judiciary.

Way Forward:

- **Capacity Building:** Regular training for police, judges, and medical staff on child rights and trauma-informed procedures.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Community-level initiatives to educate people about the law and the importance of reporting abuse.
- **Use of Technology:** Leveraging AI and digital tools to trace and curb circulation of child sexual abuse material.
- **Victim Support Systems:** Counselling, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims must be institutionalized.

Model UPSC Questions:

Q **Discuss the significance of the POCSO Act in addressing child sexual abuse in India. What challenges impede its effective implementation?**

Q **With the growing use of the internet and digital platforms, examine how the POCSO Act can be adapted to address online child sexual exploitation.**

Ayushman Bharat – Health Insurance for Senior Citizens

Context:

In a major step toward universal health coverage, the Union Cabinet has approved the extension of the **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)** to include **all senior citizens aged 70 years and above**, regardless of their income level or access to public healthcare systems.

Background & Need:

India is experiencing a demographic transition with a rapidly growing elderly population. As of the 2011 Census, nearly 8.6% of India's population was over 60, and this figure is expected to rise significantly by 2030. Many elderly citizens, especially those not part of formal employment sectors, face **high out-of-pocket health expenses**, limited insurance penetration, and inadequate access to tertiary healthcare.

This policy reform seeks to provide **financial risk protection** to the elderly and strengthen India's move toward **universal health coverage**, especially in line with the goals of the **National Health Policy, 2017**.

Current Features of AB PM-JAY:

- **Launched in 2018**, Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is the **world's largest government-funded health insurance scheme**, providing **Rs 5 lakh per family per year** for secondary and tertiary hospitalization.

- Targeted at **40% of the most vulnerable population**, it covers **over 12 crore families** based on deprivation and occupational criteria from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data.
- Entirely **cashless and paperless** at the point of service, across **public and empaneled private hospitals**.

Expanded Coverage for Senior Citizens (2024 Reform):

- **Eligibility:**
  - All individuals aged **70 years and above**, even if they fall outside income-based eligibility.
  - Those already covered under PM-JAY will now receive **an additional Rs 5 lakh top-up** for senior citizens in their household.
- **Top-Up Structure:**
  - The Rs 5 lakh top-up is **shared among eligible senior members** in a family.
  - For instance, in a family with two seniors aged 70+, the top-up will be split between them.
- **Beneficiary Impact:**
  - Expected to benefit over **6 crore senior citizens** from **4.5 crore families**.
- **Health Cards:**
  - Special **health cards will be issued** to the eligible seniors to facilitate easy access and identification at hospitals.
- **Compatibility:**
  - The scheme is designed to **coexist with other public and private health insurance plans**, including CGHS (for government employees), ECHS (for ex-servicemen), Ayushman CAPF (for central armed police forces), ESIC, and private insurers.
  - Seniors may **opt-in or switch** from existing schemes to the expanded PM-JAY, depending on their preference.

Significance:

- **Reduces Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE):** Elderly individuals often suffer from chronic illnesses requiring frequent hospitalization.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Recognizes the health vulnerabilities of old age irrespective of income status.
- **Strengthens Preventive Care and Geriatric Health Infrastructure:** Encourages the development of elderly-friendly hospitals and healthcare

services.

- **Boosts Financial Protection:** Provides a safety net for one of the most financially and medically vulnerable segments.

Challenges Ahead:

- **Infrastructure Gap:** India still lacks widespread geriatric-care facilities in rural and Tier-II/III cities.
- **Awareness and Digital Literacy:** Elderly citizens may face challenges in understanding digital health cards and scheme procedures.
- **Fraud and Leakages:** Ensuring proper beneficiary identification and preventing misuse remains crucial.

Way Forward:

- Expand **public-private partnerships** to increase hospital network capacity.
- Establish **dedicated geriatric units** in district hospitals.
- Run **awareness campaigns** in local languages with help from ASHAs and local authorities.
- Use **digital health records** (ABHA ID) and **U-WIN portal** for seamless integration.

Model UPSC Questions:

Q **Discuss the significance of expanding Ayushman Bharat to cover all senior citizens aged 70 and above. What challenges could arise in its implementation?**

Q **"Health insurance is a key pillar in achieving universal health coverage." Examine this statement in the context of India's elderly population.**

Child Betrothals

Context:

The Supreme Court of India recently highlighted that **child betrothals**—agreements made between families involving children before they reach the legal age of marriage—are being misused to evade punishment under the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006**. The Court held such practices violate children's fundamental rights to free choice, autonomy, and childhood.

What is Child Betrothal?

- Child betrothal refers to a **promise or agreement** between families to marry their children at a future date, usually before the children attain the legal marriageable age.

- It does **not constitute an immediate marriage**, but it is considered a **binding commitment** or step toward formal marriage when children reach the eligible age.
- This practice is culturally entrenched in some communities, despite legal prohibitions on child marriage.

Legal Framework:

- The **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** prohibits marriage below the age of 18 for girls and 21 for boys.
- However, the Act **does not explicitly ban child betrothal** as a separate offense.
- This legal gap allows some families to **circumvent the law** by entering into betrothal arrangements instead of formal marriage.
- The Supreme Court has urged the **Parliament to clarify the law** and ban child betrothals explicitly, recognizing their harmful impact.

Social and Demographic Facts:

- Child marriage rates in India have **declined from 47% in 2015-16 to 27% in 2019-21**.
- Despite progress, over **11.5 lakh children remain at risk**, with states like **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal** reporting high numbers.
- NFHS-5 data indicates states such as **Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh** still have **over 40% of women aged 20-24 married before 18**.
- Child betrothal practices perpetuate gender inequality, curtail girls' education, and pose health risks.

Why Child Betrothal is Problematic?

- Violates **fundamental rights**: Freedom to choose a life partner, bodily autonomy, and right to childhood.
- It delays but does not prevent early marriages, effectively **undermining the spirit** of PCMA.
- Leads to **psychological trauma and health complications**, including early pregnancy and maternal mortality.
- Perpetuates **poverty and illiteracy**, especially among girls.

Supreme Court's Position:

- Child betrothals are being used as a loophole to **evade legal action**.
- The Court emphasizes that **childhood is a fundamental right** protected under Articles 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) and 14 (Right to Equality) of the Constitution.

- Urges the legislature to enact laws that explicitly **prohibit child betrothals** to ensure effective prevention.

Way Forward:

- **Legislative reform** to explicitly criminalize child betrothals.
- Strengthening **awareness and community engagement** to change social norms.
- Empowering **women and girls through education and economic opportunities**.
- Robust **monitoring and enforcement mechanisms** to prevent both child marriage and betrothal.
- Involving **local governance and Panchayati Raj institutions** in child protection.

Model UPSC Questions:

Q Discuss the social and legal challenges posed by child betrothals in India. How does it undermine the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006?

Q Examine the constitutional rights violated by child betrothals and the role of the judiciary in protecting child rights in India.

World Survey on the Role of Women in Development Report

Background and Explanation:

The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development by the United Nations evaluates the progress and challenges in establishing gender-responsive social protection systems worldwide. Despite international commitments toward gender equality, over two billion women and girls lack access to critical social protection measures such as cash transfers, unemployment insurance, pensions, and healthcare.

Alarmingly, more than 63% of women globally give birth without maternity benefits. Vulnerabilities faced by women are further worsened by crises like conflict, climate change, and economic shocks.

UN Women, the UN entity dedicated to gender equality, was formed in 2010 by merging four specialized bodies. It plays a vital role in advocating policies and programs that empower women globally.

The report underscores the necessity for robust, inclusive social protection systems tailored to women's unique needs, ensuring their health, economic security, and social inclusion. Strengthening such frameworks is vital to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those targeting poverty eradication, health, and gender equality.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q **"Evaluate the key challenges in providing gender-responsive social protection globally as highlighted in the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. How can strengthening social protection systems contribute to women's empowerment and sustainable development?"**

PM YASASVI (Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India)

Background and Explanation:

The PM Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (PM-YASASVI) is a flagship initiative by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, aimed at promoting educational empowerment among marginalized communities such as Other Backward Classes (OBC), Economically Backward Classes (EBC), and De-notified Tribes (DNT).

The scheme provides scholarships for students from Class 9 onward, addressing the financial constraints that hinder access to quality education.

De-notified Tribes refer to communities formerly labelled under the British-era Criminal Tribes Act, which was repealed in 1952. The scheme's objective aligns with the principles of social justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution by fostering equal opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups.

It leverages technology and targeted outreach to identify beneficiaries and facilitate educational advancement, thus contributing to social inclusion and economic mobility.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

"Discuss the significance of the PM YASASVI scheme in addressing educational disparities among marginalized communities in India. What challenges remain in ensuring effective implementation and reaching the intended beneficiaries?"

Jeevan Pramaan

Background:

In India, pensioners are required to submit a life certificate every year to receive their pension. Traditionally, this process demanded physical presence at banks or pension offices, causing inconvenience especially to elderly pensioners residing in remote or rural areas.

Explanation:

To address this challenge, the Government launched **Jeevan Pramaan** in 2014 — a biometric-enabled digital life certificate service. This initiative allows pensioners to digitally generate and submit their life certificates without

physically visiting the pension disbursing authorities. The system uses biometric authentication and digital platforms, thereby improving accessibility, reducing paperwork, and preventing fraud.

It is implemented by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions through the Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare. The service is accessible via banks, post offices, and other government agencies. However, remarried or re-employed pensioners are excluded from this digital service and must follow the conventional method.

Significance:

- Simplifies the process for pensioners, especially the elderly and those in remote areas.
- Enhances transparency and efficiency in pension disbursal.
- Demonstrates the use of digital technology in governance and welfare schemes, aligning with the Digital India initiative.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q "Examine the role of Jeevan Pramaan in improving the pension delivery system in India. Discuss how digital innovations are transforming governance and welfare services for senior citizens."

TULIP (Traditional Artisans' Upliftment Livelihood Programme)

Background:

Artisans from marginalized communities in India, including Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, sanitation workers, and persons with disabilities, often face challenges in marketing their traditional products. The dominance of intermediaries and lack of access to wider markets limit their income and growth.

Explanation:

To empower these artisans, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched **TULIP**, a digital e-marketing platform under the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation. TULIP allows artisans to showcase and sell their handicrafts and traditional products globally under a common brand.

This platform bypasses intermediaries, enabling artisans to directly access national and international buyers, enhancing their incomes and promoting cultural heritage. The program also provides artisans with digital literacy and marketing skills, fostering sustainable livelihoods.

Significance:

- Promotes economic empowerment and social inclusion of marginalized artisans.
- Supports preservation of traditional crafts and cultural heritage.
- Aligns with government priorities on skill development, digital inclusion, and livelihood promotion under schemes like Make in India and Digital India.

Model UPSC Mains Question:

Q "Discuss how digital platforms like TULIP can help uplift marginalized artisans in India. What challenges and opportunities do such initiatives present in preserving traditional crafts and promoting inclusive economic growth?"