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International Nurses Day 2026: "Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies"

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International Nurses Day 2026: "Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies"

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WHY IN NEWS

International Nurses Day (IND) is observed every year on **May 12**, the birth anniversary of **Florence Nightingale (born May 12, 1820)**. The 2026 theme of the **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is **"Our Nurses. Our Future. Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies."** The day coincides with the launch of the **World Health Organization's second State of the World's Nursing report**. The **Indian Nursing Council (INC)** coordinates the national observance.

WHY NURSES MATTER

INDICATOR	VALUE
Global nursing workforce	~29 million (WHO, 2025)
Global shortfall by 2030	~5.7 million (down from 6.2 million in 2020)
Indian registered nurses	~3.4 million (INC, 2025)
Active nursing workforce in India	Significantly lower (gap of registration vs active practice)
WHO recommended nurse-population ratio	1 : 1,000 (3 nurses per 1,000 people)
India's actual ratio	~1.7 per 1,000 (well below norm)
National Health Policy 2017 target	1 : 300 for the broader skilled health workforce

Nurses constitute the **largest occupational group in health systems globally** – nearly **59% of all health professionals**.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE – THE ARCHITECT OF MODERN NURSING

YEAR / EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
May 12, 1820 – Born	In Florence, Italy (hence the name) to a wealthy British family
1854-1856 – Crimean War	Led 38 nurses to the field at Scutari; reduced military hospital mortality from 42% to 2% through sanitation
1859 – <i>Notes on Nursing</i>	First systematic text on modern nursing
1860 – Nightingale Training School	World’s first secular nursing school at St Thomas’ Hospital, London
1860 – <i>Notes on Hospitals</i>	Pioneered hospital design principles
1907 – Order of Merit	First woman to receive it from a British monarch
1910 – Died	August 13, London

She also pioneered **statistical visualisation** – her “coxcomb” rose diagrams of British troop mortality remain foundational in public-health communication.

ICN – THE 2026 THEME

“Our Nurses. Our Future. Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies.”

The theme makes three connected claims:

- ❶ **Nurse well-being is a precondition for system performance** – burnout reduces care quality
- ❷ **Investing in nurses pays back as productivity gains** – the WHO **High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth** estimates a multiplier effect
- ❸ **Migration, retention, and pay** – 1 in 7 nurses globally is now working in a country other than their birth country

WHO – STATE OF THE WORLD’S NURSING REPORT (SECOND EDITION)

- The **first edition was in 2020** – the WHO’s flagship audit of nursing data
- The **second edition (2026)** – launched alongside International Nurses Day – updates data through 2025

- Key reports likely to be reaffirmed: persistent maldistribution; rising migration; gender gap (89% of nurses are women, but men dominate leadership)

INDIA'S NURSING ARCHITECTURE

BODY / PROGRAMME	FUNCTION
Indian Nursing Council (INC)	Statutory regulator under the Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947 ; registration, exam, education standards
State Nursing Councils	Maintain state-level registers
Trained Nurses' Association of India (TNAI)	Professional association; member of ICN since 1922
ANMs and GNMs	Auxiliary Nurse Midwives; General Nursing & Midwifery
B.Sc. (Nursing) / M.Sc. (Nursing)	Recognised nursing degrees under INC
Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (linked)	Healthcare delivery touchpoint nurses staff

Key recent reforms

- **National Nursing & Midwifery Commission Act, 2023** – passed by Parliament; replaces the INC Act, 1947 once notified; creates a new commission with four autonomous boards (UG, PG, registration, ethics)
- **Aspirational nursing colleges** – 157 new colleges sanctioned alongside new medical colleges since 2024

THE BIG PICTURE ISSUES

Migration

- Indian nurses migrate in large numbers to **Gulf states, UK, USA, Germany, Japan**
- **Kerala** is India's largest nurse-exporting state
- Bilateral MoUs (India-UK 2022; India-Germany 2022) attempt to streamline migration ethically

Workforce conditions

- Heavy nurse-patient ratios in public hospitals (often 1:60 in wards vs WHO norm 1:6 in critical care)

- Salary gaps between public and private sectors
- Limited career-ladder beyond nursing supervisor roles

Gender lens

- Nursing is overwhelmingly female globally (89%)
- Pay parity, leadership representation, safety at workplace are open issues

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 – Social Justice and Governance

- Issues relating to development of social sectors: health, education
- Government policies and welfare schemes
- International institutions: WHO, ICN
- Vulnerable workforce categories

GS Paper 1 – Society

- Role of women; gendered occupations
- Social problems in health workforce

Mains Angles

- 1 The Indian nursing workforce is large in registration but small in active practice. Critically discuss the structural issues.
- 2 Migration of health professionals from India: is it a brain drain, a remittance asset, or both? Evaluate.
- 3 The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Act, 2023 was a long-awaited reform. Discuss its key features.

Observed annually on May 12 (Florence Nightingale's birth anniversary, May 12, 1820).

International Council of Nurses; founded **1899**; HQ Geneva; oldest international health profession association; member federations across 130+ countries.

"Our Nurses. Our Future. Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies."

Pioneer of modern nursing; led Crimean War field nursing (1854-56); founded the first secular nursing school (St Thomas' Hospital, London, 1860); author of Notes on Nursing (1859); pioneer of public-health statistics (coxcomb / polar area diagrams).

Statutory body under the **Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947**; sets standards for nursing education; registers nurses.

Passed by Parliament; once notified, replaces INC; provides for four autonomous boards (UG, PG, registration, ethics).

First edition 2020; second edition 2026.

~3.4 million registered (INC, 2025); active workforce much smaller; nurse-population ratio ~1.7 per 1,000 (WHO norm: 3 per 1,000).

May 5 – International Day of the Midwife; World Health Day, observed since 1950 on April 7 each year.

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