



ASHA Workers in India

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

[Accredited Social Health Activists \(ASHAs\)](#) in Kerala staged protests demanding higher wages and retirement benefits.

Who are ASHA Workers?

- **About:** ASHAs are **community health volunteers** introduced under the **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)**, 2005 to provide essential healthcare services in rural areas.
 - In 2013, the NRHM merged with the **National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)** to form the [National Health Mission \(NHM\)](#).
 - ASHAs work alongside [Anganwadi Workers \(AWWs\)](#) under the [Integrated Child Development Scheme \(ICDS\)](#) to improve healthcare accessibility.
 - An ASHA is a local woman (age 25-45 years), preferably married, widowed, or divorced, with at **least Class 10 education**. NHM considers them volunteers, **limiting their earnings to task-based incentives**.
 - ASHAs serve **one per 1,000 people**, with 9.2 lakh in rural and 79,900 in urban areas (2022-23).
- **Key Responsibilities of ASHAs:** Ensure **antenatal check-ups, and postnatal care**, while educating mothers on **breastfeeding and infant nutrition**.
 - ASHAs support **immunization, tuberculosis (TB) treatment, malaria screenings, and disease prevention**. Additionally, they provide **basic healthcare, essential medicines**, first aid, and report births and deaths.
- **Concerns of ASHA Workers:** ASHAs face **low** (approx Rs 5000-15000) **and irregular payments**, receiving only a **nominal honorarium and task-based incentives** that vary by state and are often delayed due to **funding issues and Centre-State disputes**.
 - Despite their **crucial role during Covid-19**, earning them the [World Health Organization's \(WHO's\) World Health Leaders Award in 2022](#), their struggles persist.
 - They **are not** classified as government employees, denying them **fixed wages, pensions, gratuity, provident funds, and medical insurance**, though some states, like **Andhra Pradesh**, offer gratuity.
 - The **2020 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour** recommended **formalizing their roles**, but no action was taken.
 - ASHAs, mostly **women from marginalized backgrounds**, also face **gender-based discrimination** in the workforce.

How Can ASHA Workers Be Empowered?

- **Formalization:** Recognizing ASHAs as government employees or at least contractual workers with job benefits under the [Code on Social Security, 2020](#) would ensure they receive essential labor rights and protections.
- **Skill Development:** Offer training programs for ASHAs to upgrade their skills and transition into

higher healthcare roles (e.g., **Auxiliary Nurse and Midwives**).

- **Financial Security:** With rising inflation, ASHA workers need financial security. A fixed **salary alongside incentives ensures stability**, while [Direct Benefit Transfers \(DBT\)](#) prevent payment delays, empowering them to focus on healthcare without financial distress.

National Health Mission (NHM)

- NHM aims to ensure universal access to quality, affordable, and equitable healthcare services while advancing toward **Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**.
- NHM, extended till 2026 and implemented by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, supports States/UTs in providing accessible and affordable healthcare, focusing on rural infrastructure, workforce, and service delivery.

Read more: [ASHA Workers & Related Challenges](#)

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss how ASHA workers contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. With reference to the National Rural Health Mission, which of the following are the jobs of 'ASHA', a trained community health worker? (2012)

1. Accompanying women to the health facility for antenatal care checkup
2. Using pregnancy test kits for early detection of pregnancy
3. Providing information on nutrition and immunization.
4. Conducting the delivery of baby

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (a)