

## International Women's Day Celebrated For the First Time

### Background of International Women's Day



Women's Day in Russia, 1917

International Women's Day was observed by the United Nations for the first time on 8 March 1975. 1975 was also declared the International Women's Year.

- The very first day for women in the modern era was celebrated in the United States of America on February 28, 1909 when the Socialist Party of America observed a National Woman's Day.
- This day was marked in honour of a garment workers' strike that had taken place in New York in 1908.
- In 1910, at the Socialist International Meeting held in Copenhagen, the participants decided to observe a day of the year as 'Women's Day' to support the movement for women's rights and universal suffrage. More than 100 women from 17 countries took part in it along with the first 3 women elected to the parliament of Finland.
- The next year, as an outcome of the meeting in 1910, the first 'International Women's Day' was celebrated on 19 March in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Men and women attended rallies and demanded for women the right to vote and hold public office, the right to work, the right to receive vocational training and to stop discrimination at work.
- During the First World War years, women's day was marked in Russia by women on the last Sunday in the month of February. This was also seen as a movement for peace.
- The first International Women's Day to be held on March 8 was in the year 1914. This was held in many countries in Europe. In London, women marched from Bow to Trafalgar Square where they demanded women's suffrage. Suffragist Sylvia Pankhurst was arrested.
- Again in Russia in 1917, women held a protest known as the 'Bread and Peace' campaign on the last Sunday in February. This demonstration started by women textile workers actually was the beginning of the [Russian Revolution](#). This day fell on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March in the Gregorian calendar. A few days later, the Russian Czar abdicated and the new provisional government gave women the right to vote.

- For many years, women's day was being celebrated chiefly by communist countries. Then in 1975, the United Nations declared the year as the 'International Women's Year'.
- In Mexico City, the UN World Conference on Women was held for the first time in June-July 1975. As a result, the World Plan of Action was adopted as well as a declaration which led to the setting up of monitoring mechanisms. The United Nations Development Fund for Women was also established.

## International Women's Day – Importance

International Women's Day is observed every year globally to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political accomplishments of women. On this day, people form groups and organise rallies or campaigns for women's equality and also celebrate women's achievements.

The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity, as envisaged in the Goal 5 of [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Read more from the linked article.

### Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- Even though, gender equality is not a fundamental right, it is necessary for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world, especially for women to live in.
- Some targets of goal 5 are:
  1. End all forms of discrimination and violence against all women and girls everywhere.
  2. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
  3. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
  4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
  5. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

### Some facts

- Globally, 750 million women and girls were married before the age of 18.
- About 60 percent of women around the world are employed in the informal sector, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty.
- Women earn 23% less than men globally.
- Women occupy only 24% of parliamentary seats worldwide.
- 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence.
- Approximately, 200 million of girls-women have suffered genital mutilation.

These facts are sourced from the websites of the United Nations. These facts are indicating that the women's equality and empowerment still needs focus; and all the governments across the globe have to formulate their policies and legislations to accelerate gender parity.

March 8th, International Women's Day (IWD) hold significance as it:

- celebrate women's achievements
- raise awareness about women's equality
- lobby for accelerated gender parity
- fundraise for female-focused charities

**Colours of IWD**  
Purple, green and white are the colours of International Women's Day.

- Purple – justice and dignity
- Green symbolizes hope
- White represents purity, albeit a controversial concept.

The colours originated from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the UK in 1908.

## Theme of International Women's Day 2021

The campaign theme for the International Women's Day (IWD) 2021 is “**#ChooseToChallenge**”.