

# NEWS FROM BRUSSELS



## Word From Senior Policy Advisor Dr. Theodoros Koutroubas

Dear Friends,

In this issue we are very happy to report important activities of some of our members.

From our Italian member FNOPI: President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella joined FNOPI's centenary celebrations on International Nurses Day — the first time a Head of State has added the country's highest institutional voice to the recognition of nursing.

From Croatia, HKMS President Mario Gazić offers a frank counterpoint to Croatia's minister of health optimism, reminding us that positive headlines must be weighed against hard realities.

In Geneva, the President of Romania's Regulatory Body of Nurses and our own President, Mircea Timofte, took part in the 79th World Health Assembly — a signal that nursing's voice is reaching the highest levels of global health governance.

Finally, across the Channel, a former PE teacher is among the first cohort to enter nursing through a new apprenticeship degree in England; a subject of future discussion among us.

Do come back with questions and feedback.

Kind regards,

Theo

## NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

**A Historic First for FNOPI: President of the Republic Mattarella Joins Italian Nurses to Celebrate a Century of the Profession**

**Croatian Chamber of Nurses: President Mario Gazić Challenges the Ministry's Optimism on Croatia's Nursing Crisis**

**Participation of the President of the Romanian Regulatory Body of Nurses and President of the ENC at the 79th World Health Assembly**

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## A Historic First for FNOPI: President Mattarella Joins Italian Nurses to Celebrate a Century of the Profession



**For the first time in Italian history, the President of the Republic took part in the celebrations of International Nurses Day.** In Rome, in a packed and deeply moved Auditorium Antonianum, the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, intervened on May 12th 2026, at the celebrations of International Nurses Day.

Mattarella delivered his greetings to Italian nurses with words that will be remembered: «Thank you for your work: it is an example of ethics and humanity. The Federation's commitment, focused on training and ethics, is a decisive contribution. I wish you to continue along the path of your commitment. And to grow. You are an engine that drives the path of civilization forward.»

The President continued: «Your daily work is, therefore, a solid point of reference in the life of the entire community. You are the protagonists of rights enshrined in the Constitution. Caring for the person — caring for them — and not just for the illness is a change of perspective, which we perceive as a more mature and conscious commitment within society. To achieve this, the nursing professions increasingly become a decisive pivot, even more so in a form of medicine that tends toward hyper-technologization. The nurse, therefore, works at a crossroads of high human values. As the President said, there are now 462,000 nurses today. We know that this number is insufficient compared to the care needs of the population. It is an issue that cannot be avoided and that calls into question both training and the recognition of the centrality of this function. Because this function, its centrality, is essential for the proper functioning of our society as a whole.»

The event, organized by FNOPI and held in the presence of numerous authorities, representatives from the world of science and health, and the presidents of 102 professional Orders of the nursing professions, was opened by the report of FNOPI's president, **Barbara Mangiacavalli**. She recalled how this year's May 12 celebrations coincide with an academic reform of epochal significance for the registered 462,000 nurses and pediatric nurses, for young university students, and for those approaching this profession.



Ms Barbara Mangiacavalli President of FNOPI salutes the President of the Italian Republic.

**This consists of the establishment of three new master's degree programs in Nursing Sciences: Primary Care and Family and Community Nursing; Neonatal and Pediatric Care; and Intensive and Emergency Care.** This achievement is the result of years of work conducted by FNOPI in full synergy with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of University and Research.

During the morning, **Francesco Saverio Marini, Judge of the Constitutional Court**, gave a report on "The Constitutional Foundation of Nursing Knowledge," emphasizing how it is **«evident that the described needs to increase the number of nurses or their compensation, or to invest in their training, are not cost-free and require an assessment in terms of financial sustainability.** But these evaluations, although necessary, must take into account that, according to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court, **the right to health is an incompressible right.** And **it is the guarantee of incompressible rights that must guide budgetary choices, not budgetary balance that conditions their due provision.»**

The **Minister of Health, Orazio Schillaci**, who attended the event, highlighted – both as a physician and as an academic – the path of growth consolidated over these years: « I want to say it clearly: in the hundred years of history we are celebrating today, nursing has gone from being a predominantly assistive activity to becoming an autonomous scientific discipline, founded on advanced competencies, research, innovation, and relational skills. **Today, the nurse is an active protagonist in care processes, a point of reference for patients, families, and the entire community. As Minister of Health, but also as a former rector and, above all, as a physician, I have no hesitation in emphasizing that among all the healthcare professions, nursing plays a central and irreplaceable role.** All of you who are here today represent professionals who are a constant, competent, and human presence in the lives of citizens and the sick. You have always been able to combine knowledge and compassion, technology and listening, professional rigor and closeness.» The Minister then added: «Today, we want to write a new chapter together with you for the Italian nursing community. Above all, to provide an answer to the legitimate expectations of young professionals: to offer career prospects, to enhance advanced competencies, and to build clear and attractive paths for professional growth.»



President of the Italian Republic addresses FNOPI members

# HKMS Sounds the Alarm: President Mario Gazić Challenges the Ministry's Optimism on Croatia's Nursing Crisis



**The President of the Croatian Chamber of Nurses (HKMS), Mario Gazić**, appeared on "Novi dan", a Croatian morning television program, to comment on the problems in the healthcare system and to criticise what he describes as the **Croatian Minister of Health Irena Hrstić's** tendency to overlook serious structural problems and instead present an overly optimistic picture of the situation.

His remarks came in the context of the occasion of International Nurses Day on May 12, during which **the Croatian Chamber of Nurses, the Croatian Professional Union of Nurses and Medical Technicians, and 21 professional nursing associations issued a warning about the serious state of the nursing profession and the necessity of urgent and systematic action by the competent institutions** — action that must be based on accepting the justified demands of the profession as the only path toward stabilizing the system.

While the Minister of Health has publicly highlighted that nurses are returning to Croatia and that employment numbers are on the rise, Gazić offered a more nuanced reading of the data. **According to him, the profession is now speaking with a unified voice about what needs to be fixed. Although 130 nurses left the country in 2025, a total of 221 returned during the same year. He explained that, based on conversations with returning nurses, the main reasons for their decision are the sense of security in Croatia and the high cost of living abroad.** Many of them, he noted, are young families with children entering school age, who are finding life abroad increasingly difficult.

**Gazić emphasized that one of the central goals of the profession has been to halt the outflow of nurses leaving Croatia for work elsewhere. With more than one thousand Croatian nurses currently employed abroad, he stressed that significant efforts are being made to encourage their return.** The Declaration issued by the nursing organizations, he explained, should be understood as an appeal to both the Ministry and the Government to take concrete action.



HKMS President M. Mario Gazić (left)

**He cautioned, however, against interpreting the recent figures as a positive trend, since the data reflects only the year 2025. Croatia is currently short of approximately 4,000 nurses, and with only a hundred-person surplus this year, it would take roughly 40 years at the current pace to close the gap.** He stressed that the profession has been raising these concerns for several years and that nurses are not seeking conflict but rather a genuine partnership grounded in respect for professional expertise.

**The situation, Mr. Gazić warned, is set to worsen considerably in the coming years. Around 5,000 nurses are expected to meet the requirements for retirement within the next five years,** which will further intensify the shortage. He described a workforce that is already exhausted, under constant pressure, and burdened by the sense that their work is not adequately valued. Through the Declaration, the profession is also calling for an increase in enrollment quotas in both secondary schools and university programs.

He pointed out a worrying trend in which many young people, after completing their nursing education, choose to pursue careers in other sectors that offer better financial prospects rather than entering the healthcare system.

**When asked whether the Ministry is responding to these appeals, Gazić expressed his frustration with the pace of reform.** He described the administration as slow and rigid, noting that issues concerning nurses are never resolved quickly or efficiently, with bureaucratic processes consistently delaying progress. **He nevertheless expressed cautious optimism, pointing to the fact that work on a new Nursing Act is expected to begin this year, which he hopes will lay healthier foundations for the profession.**

A central priority for the new legislation, in his view, should be the formal definition of nursing as a profession in its own right. Such recognition would, through an expansion of specialization opportunities, grant nurses greater professional authority. As things stand, he noted, nurses perform medical and technical procedures as quickly as possible, but the personal contact with patients is increasingly lost, as staff are forced to rush in order to complete their tasks.

## Participation of the President of the Romanian Regulatory Body of Nurses and President of the ENC at the 79th World Health Assembly



The President of the Regulatory Body of General Nurses, Midwives and Nurses of Romania (OAMGMAMR) and President of the ENC, Mircea Timofte, participates in the 79th edition of the World Health Assembly (WHA79), held in Geneva, from May 18–23, 2026. Leading global decision-making forum in the field of health, the Assembly brings together member states, international organizations and experts to define global priorities in health. **This year's edition took place in a context marked by concerns about emerging and re-emerging epidemic outbreaks, highlighting the need to strengthen international cooperation, epidemiological surveillance and response capacities.** The WHA79 agenda includes topics such as financing and reforming the WHO, pandemic preparedness, universal health coverage, updating the Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2026–2036), mental health, noncommunicable diseases, immunization, combating tuberculosis and rare diseases, protecting healthcare workers, and developing digital health and artificial intelligence in health.



In this context, the participation of OAMGMAMR reflects the constant commitment to the promotion of the profession of nurse and midwife and to the active involvement in the international dialogue on the future of health systems and human resources in the field. On the sidelines of the Assembly, on the afternoon of May 18, 2026, President of Timofte also participated in the event "Strengthening Nursing Engagement in Global Health", organized by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the World Health Assembly (WHO), at the ICN headquarters in Geneva.

The meeting brought together more than 150 participants, in physical and online format, and addressed the role of leadership, cooperation and the development of the nursing profession in the **global health agenda**. The discussions highlighted the importance of nursing leadership, mentoring programmes, as well as the strategic role of the WHO Collaborating Centres and the WHO Academy in training, continuous training and strengthening the skills of health professionals.



# From the classroom to the ward: the nurse apprenticeship opening a new door into healthcare



A former PE teacher who spent more than eight years in schools before retraining to become a nurse said she had been given "a fabulous opportunity" to learn on the job.

Taibar Akhtar is part of the first tranche of students on the Nursing Associate Apprenticeship Degree, delivered in partnership with the University of Lancashire and Blackburn College.

**Based in a training facility resembling a real hospital ward, students learn on mannequins which can be programmed to have a range of different symptoms.** Taibar, from Clitheroe, said working with the mannequins allowed students to "make mistakes, rather than in real life, where you have someone's life in your hands".

Taibar started her two-year apprenticeship course in March. Students spend four days a week on placement, usually at Blackburn Royal Hospital, and one day a week at Blackburn College.

She said "not anybody" can become a nurse and that "you've got to be a caring person, and empathetic".

**Course leader Marjorie Dalton said the course encouraged "people who wouldn't normally have an opportunity to do the traditional route to nursing, through the universities" to get into healthcare.**

It has been helped by the use of the "high fidelity mannequins", she said.



They can be programmed to "have breathing difficulties, heart conditions, cardiac arrests", she said, which allows students to practise treating patients, or escalating the situation to a registered nurse.

Taibar described the mannequins, which cost up to £35,000 each, as "a bit freaky".

"They do talk to you... you can take bloods from them, they have a heartbeats, you can check their sats [blood saturation levels], their observations," she said.

### **'Raring to go'**

Taibar said she spends one day a week at university and 30 hours "learning new skills on the job".

"It's different from being in the classroom all the time, and being at university full-time, and only having short placements," she said.

"You've also got to be quite resilient with it, you go through different walks and paths from people passing away sadly, to people coming in poorly and seeing the positive side of it, seeing them leave the hospital wards back on their feet and raring to go.

"I'm on my feet all the time like I was before [as a PE teacher], so not much has changed in that sense.

"But it's a fabulous opportunity."