

74th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, 29-31 October 2024, Copenhagen, Denmark

Agenda Item 10: Health emergency preparedness, response and resilience in the WHO European Region 2024–2029: a new regional strategy and action plan (Preparedness 2.0)

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) joined by the European Forum of National Nurses and Midwives Associations, the European Federation of Nurses Associations and the European Nursing Students Association speaking on behalf of the world's millions of nurses and midwives, supports the new regional strategy and action plan (Preparedness 2.0), emphasizing that a well-prepared and protected health workforce is vital for effective emergency response. To strengthen resilience and emergency preparedness, we offer two key recommendations:

1. Workforce Capacity-Building and Surge Preparedness

Strengthening the health workforce's ability to respond to emergencies is essential. This goes beyond increasing the number of available healthcare workers during crises to ensuring they are properly trained and equipped to deliver care in emergency settings. Nurses and midwives, constituting about 59% of the global health workforce, are at the heart of these efforts. We call for the active involvement of nurses and midwives in emergency preparedness, including surge capacity planning and training in disaster response, triage, and crisis management. Equipping nurses and midwives with skills in emergency care, mental health support, and trauma management is crucial for improving overall emergency response capabilities.

2. Protection of the Health Workforce and Safeguarding Rights

Protecting health workers and safeguarding their rights is essential to ensuring they can respond effectively in emergencies and ensuring the continuity of health services. We advocate for the protection of health workers and healthcare facilities, underscoring that they should never be targeted in conflicts or crises. Health workers must be allowed to provide care impartially, without fear of violence, as mandated by international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions. Additionally, we urge Member States to uphold the rights of health workers, ensuring fair compensation, sufficient resources, and support for their mental and physical well-being during and after crises.

Investing in nursing workforce capacity-building, surge preparedness, and the protection of healthcare personnel is essential for the European Region to meet the growing challenges posed by emergencies and disasters. We remain committed to collaborating with Member States to achieve these goals.

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurse's associations (NNAs), representing the more than 28 million nurses worldwide. ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all, sound health policies globally, the advancement of nursing knowledge, and the presence worldwide of a respected nursing profession and a competent and satisfied nursing workforce.

The European Forum of National Nurses and Midwives Associations (EFNNMA) is the joint voice of nursing and midwifery in the WHO European Region and was established to promote the continuous development of the nursing and midwifery professions in all Member States in the region in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) represents over 36 National Nurses' Associations and its work impacts on the daily work of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe. The EFN is the independent voice of the nursing profession and its mission is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU & Europe.

The European Nursing Students Association (ENSA) is the voice of nursing students across the WHO/European Region, representing over 160,000 students committed to advancing the profession and advocating for high-quality nursing education. The ENSA currently unites 16 student member organizations from various European countries, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action to empower the next generation of nurses. The ENSA strives to create a strong, united front that influences healthcare policies and promotes the development of future nursing leaders.