

72 nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 15–17 October 2025

Item 4 (b) Health issues facing populations affected by disasters and emergencies, including implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing more than 30 million nurses worldwide, welcomes the progress report on health issues facing populations affected by disasters and emergencies, including implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005). The report underscores that the Region continues to face complex and protracted health emergencies caused by multiple hazards, yet the growing needs and associated risks remain critically underfunded.

ICN stresses that preparedness for all hazards depends on a strong, protected, and well-resourced health workforce. Building workforce capacity and ensuring surge preparedness are essential. This means not only increasing the availability of health workers during crises, but also guaranteeing that they receive continuous education, appropriate tools, and adequate infrastructure to deliver care in emergency environments. As nurses comprise nearly 59% of the global health workforce, their role is central. ICN therefore urges Member States to resource and empower nurses, including Chief Nursing Officers, to contribute meaningfully to national IHR implementation, and to ensure that nursing leadership is explicitly represented in the designation of National IHR Authorities.

ICN's Core Competencies in Disaster Nursing provide a globally relevant framework for strengthening surge workforce readiness. Embedding these competencies into systems such as Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) will enhance emergency care delivery. Developing nurses' expertise in trauma care, mental health support, and emergency management is vital to increasing overall system resilience. ICN also calls for the integration of disaster preparedness into basic nursing curricula so that every nurse is equipped to respond to emergencies. A responsive, agile nursing workforce helps ensure continuity of care during crises, ultimately saving lives and reducing long-term health impacts.

Protecting health workers and safeguarding their rights is equally critical. As the report highlights, attacks on healthcare in conflict zones remain a grave concern: according

to WHO's Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care, nearly two-thirds of all such attacks globally were recorded in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. These assaults devastate individuals, weaken already fragile health systems, and violate international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions. ICN strongly condemns such attacks and insists that health workers and facilities must never be targeted. Nurses and other health professionals must be able to provide care impartially, safely, and without fear of violence.

Finally, ICN urges Member States to uphold the rights of health workers by ensuring fair compensation, adequate resources, and support for their mental and physical wellbeing, both during and after crises. Protecting and empowering health workers is fundamental to maintaining effective emergency response and safeguarding essential health services.

By investing in workforce capacity-building, surge preparedness, and the protection of health personnel, countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region will be better equipped to meet the escalating challenges of disasters and emergencies. ICN stands ready to work alongside Member States to achieve these shared goals.

Links

- International Nurses Day 2024 is: "Our Nurses. Our Future. The economic power of care" – <https://www.icn.ch/resources/publications-and-reports/international-nurses-day-2024-report>
- Core Competencies in Disaster Nursing: Competencies for Nurses Involved in Emergency Medical Teams (LEVEL III)
https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-04/ICN_2022_Disaster-Comp-Report_EN_WEB.pdf