

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

Item 4 (d) Strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 30 million nurses worldwide, welcomes the progress update on strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

According to WHO's State of the World's Nursing 2025 report, the projected global shortage of 4.1 nurses by 2030 is deeply concerning, particularly as the proportion of that shortage is increasing in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, about 1 million. As the largest occupational group in health, nurses play a central role in delivering services at all levels and across every health domain – from facility-based and disease-specific care to integrated, people-centred services.

ICN underscores that equity and access to primary health care, particularly nursing services, are essential to improving the health and wellbeing of all people. Yet, insufficient investment in the nursing workforce continues to drive shortages and maldistribution, creating significant barriers to reorienting health systems towards a primary health care approach. ICN calls for Member States to commit to the implementation of the Global strategic directions for nursing and midwifery (GSDNM) 2025–2030. Drawing from ICN's 2025 International Nurses Day Report – Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies, ICN highlights the mounting evidence of the challenges confronting the nursing workforce. Stress, burnout, unsafe staffing, poor working conditions, and rising workplace violence are widespread and demand urgent action. Without meaningful investment in well-prepared and well-supported nurses, building resilient and sustainable health systems will remain out of reach.

The solutions to the nursing workforce crisis are proven and urgent. ICN's Caring for Nurses Agenda offers a comprehensive, actionable model to protect and promote nurse wellbeing, focusing on seven critical areas:

1. Ensuring adequate staffing and skill mix for effective care
2. Investing in the right resources and equipment
3. Providing safe and decent working conditions

4. Supporting education, professional development, and optimal scope of practice
5. Building supportive, high-performing organizational cultures
6. Improving access to health and wellbeing supports
7. Valuing nurses with fair, competitive compensation

Addressing the nursing crisis requires long-term, sustainable strategies that recognize nurse wellbeing as fundamental to both health system resilience and economic productivity. Neglecting nurse health leads to turnover, absenteeism, and preventable errors – all of which strain health systems and national economies. By contrast, investing in nurses improves care quality, strengthens retention, and delivers measurable economic returns.

ICN urges Member States to fully recognize the essential value of the nursing workforce and to commit to transformative actions that ensure the health and wellbeing of populations. We also call for the establishment of strong nursing leadership, including Chief Nurse positions at WHO regional and national levels, to provide the dedicated direction needed for workforce strengthening.

To conclude, investing in nursing education, employment, leadership, and service delivery not only builds resilient health systems but also stimulates economic growth, creates decent jobs, and advances universal health coverage. ICN stands ready to work alongside Member States for the implementation of resolution EM/RC66/R.3, offering our resources, expertise, and evidence. Our commitment to the global advancement of nursing is unwavering, and our recent reports provide valuable insights to guide action.

Link

- 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>