



69th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean

Provisional agenda item 2e

Strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a call for action

October 2022

Honourable Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Council of Nurses and the over 27 million nurses worldwide.

ICN acknowledges the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean progress report on strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a call for action.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the contribution of the nursing workforce to strong and resilient health systems in response to health emergencies and the realisation of universal health coverage. ICN is concerned about the continuing shortage and maldistribution of the nursing workforce in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In the State of the World's Nursing report, data collected before the pandemic showed that the region has one of the lowest densities of nurses in the world. ICN emphasizes the importance of regular reporting of nursing workforce data and utilizing the data to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the health workforce and monitor the implementation of the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery 2021-2025. ICN calls on Member States to actively contribute to the WHO's data collection process in improving nursing and midwifery data.

Building on the lessons learned in the pandemic, investing in the nursing workforce and integrating the WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery into national health systems planning should be placed at the core of development for the way forward. Nurses, accounting for almost 50% of health professionals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, are leading the response in the pandemic and ensuring the delivery of safe and quality essential services in communities.

We emphasize that the engagement and empowerment of nurse leaders in the region, such as the Chief Nursing Officer at the government level, are essential to supporting the plan of action for health emergency preparedness and response and developing strategies for nursing workforce strengthening. In this regard, we call on the Regional Committee to appoint a Chief Nursing Officer for the Eastern Mediterranean region and urge Member States to establish and strengthen senior leadership positions for the nursing workforce in the region.

The **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.