

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

Agenda Item 9 - Framework for resilient and sustainable health systems in the WHO European Region 2025-2030

Before I start reading the joint statement, these are the non-state actors co-signing the statement:

- **The International Council of Nurses (ICN)**
- **The European Nursing Students Association (ENSA)**
- **The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)**
- **The European Forum of National Nurses and Midwives Associations (EFNMA)**
- **The European Association for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion (EuroSafe)**
- **The European Independent Foundation in Angiology/Vascular Medicine (VAS)**
- **The International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC)**
- **EUROCAM**
- **The European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)**

Resilient and sustainable health systems are crucial for achieving universal health coverage (UHC), reducing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and providing high-quality, safe care. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with inadequate emergency preparedness, has significantly weakened health systems across Europe, eroding trust among both patients and healthcare professionals. The region is now grappling with a mental health crisis and moral injury within the healthcare workforce and a growing shortage of health professionals, particularly nurses. With the European region projecting shortage of 21 million health and care professionals by 2030, this crisis demands urgent political action to restore trust and invest heavily in transformative national health policies, especially in the health and care workforce.

The European Forum of National Nursing and Midwifery Associations (EFNMA), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and co-signatories, fully support the Framework for Resilient and Sustainable Health Systems in the WHO European Region 2025-2030.

The Framework identifies eight key policy action areas to guide health system transformation, with a commendable focus on the health workforce as a critical component. Strengthening education is vital to ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals. Targeted recruitment campaigns that inspire and attract young people to enter the health and care professions are needed. Health systems must enhance access to continuing quality interprofessional education, promote cultural competence and digital skills and offer mentorship opportunities.

Modernising regulation is necessary to allow professionals to practice to the full scope of their education. Health systems must ensure safe staffing levels that reduce the physical burden and mental strain on health professionals and workers. Investing in safe working conditions with gender equal pay and free from harassment, violence and discrimination is fundamental to building a sustainable health care workforce. Outdated hierarchical structures should be replaced by new models of care with advanced practice professionals working in multidisciplinary teams that bring together all disciplines, in line with One Health principles, to assure a personalised patient-centered integrative healthcare system. Effective leadership is

paramount to health systems change. Member States should invest in nursing and midwifery leadership by appointing Government Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers, with dedicated budgets to support these roles.

Healthcare technology and information systems are essential, however, their effectiveness depends on an educated and competent health workforce, highlighting the vital role of ongoing development for health professionals in maximizing the impact of these tools. We further call on Member States to improve domestic workforce self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on recruitment of nurses and midwives from low- and middle-income countries thus safeguarding development of sustainable health systems globally. WHO should also consider promoting evidence-based policies that are rooted in scientific evidence and invest on existing surveillance systems and well-established EU databases (such as the IDB) which have the potential to support monitoring of health and injuries".

We urge Member States to actively engage civil society in co-creating national plans for health system transformation and to prioritise investments in the health and care workforce. Without a sustainable and skilled health workforce, healthcare systems will be unable to meet the growing challenges of the future.