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COVID-19 response

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The International Council of Nurses' (ICN) latest report contains evidence from around the world showing that nurses are experiencing psychological distress, abuse and mass traumatisation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data shows that in every region of the world nurses are reporting mental distress, including high rates of burnout and anxiety. More than 1.6 million healthcare workers have been infected in 34 countries but as data is unreliable, this number is likely much higher. New ICN evidence confirms that the death toll among nurses now exceeds 2,262.

ICN has repeatedly highlighted the ongoing and catastrophic increase in nurse infections and deaths, and the importance of data in saving lives. Adequate reporting mechanisms to ensure data availability for health workforce monitoring are not in place in many countries, or countries are failing to make the information available publicly. Comparable country data is essential to keep track of the impacts on the health workforce and monitoring for the COVID-19 response.

Unless immediate action is taken by governments to protect, support and invest in nurses, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to devastate the nursing workforce. Due to existing nursing shortages and ageing populations, we will already need to replace more than 10 million nurses in the coming years. The COVID Effect could see this rise to a number nearly half the size of the current nursing workforce.

As nurses are the backbone of health systems and the largest group of healthcare professionals, these shortages will severely impact health systems and their ability to deliver healthcare to the world's population. ICN has suggested governments create health, education and retraining opportunity, or "HERO", funds to support people who have lost their jobs in some sectors to retrain to join the healthcare workforce. ICN encourages Member States to establish these funds and to prioritise health education in recovery plans.