



## **71<sup>st</sup> session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe**

Provisional agenda item 3

### **Response to the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned to date from the WHO European Region**

**13-15 September 2021 (virtual session)**

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the European Forum of National Nursing and Midwifery Associations (EFNNMA) commends the WHO regional committee for Europe for the insightful document that presents lessons learned in the pandemic, and strongly support the new action plan to improve public health preparedness and response in the region.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the contribution of the nursing and midwifery workforces to strong and resilient health systems and the risk they are taking to respond to the pandemic. ICN and EFNNMA are seriously concerned about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce, including the persistence of high workload in difficult working conditions, the rising rates of mental distress and worsening nursing workforce shortages. It is clear that protecting the nursing workforce and supporting their roles are crucial to ensuring a functioning health system. We strongly urge Member States to ensure decent working environments and appropriate working hours, provide training and continuous education on infection control, strengthen surveillance system for health worker infections and deaths, rapidly scale up psychological support to nurses, midwives and other health workers and effectively attract and retain the nursing and midwifery workforces.

Building on the lessons learned in this crisis, investing in the nursing and midwifery workforces, and integrating the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (2021-2025) into national health systems planning should be placed at the core of development for the way forward. Nurses, accounting for 57% of health professionals in the European Region, are leading the response in the pandemic and ensuring the delivery of safe and quality essential services in communities. We emphasize the engagement and empowerment of nurse leaders in the region, such as the Chief Nursing Officer at government level is essential to supporting the design and implementation of the integrated people centred care and primary health care approaches. We also urge Member States to establish and strengthen senior leadership positions for the nursing and midwifery workforce in the region.

With humility we are learning from the pandemic to build back better and we call on Member States to invest, support and protect the nursing and midwifery workforces.



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

The **European Forum of National Nurses and Midwives Associations** (European Forum - EFNNMA) is the joint voice of nursing and midwifery in the WHO European Region and was established to promote the continuous development of the nursing and midwifery professions in all Member States in the region in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office.