

**76<sup>th</sup> Session of the Regional Committee for South East Asia, 30 October – 2 November 2023. Item 8.3. SEA/RC76/10**

**Annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs**

Honorable Chair, esteemed colleagues,

The International Council of Nurses applauds the efforts and progress detailed in this report, particularly the remarkable strides in digital health and improvements in UHC service coverage. However, as the report highlights, challenges persist, notably in health workforce density and financial protection, areas where nursing plays a pivotal role. Today, we re-emphasize the need to invest in nursing, drawing insight from the ICN 2023 Charter for Change and insights from our 2023 Recover to Rebuild.

Nurses, as the largest segment of the health workforce, are essential in achieving Universal Health Care (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current vulnerabilities in our health system due to chronic underinvestment, the evident gaps in distribution, numbers and quality of health workers are concerning. The report notes a 30.5% increase in health workforce density, yet shortages remain, especially in nursing. We cannot achieve universal health coverage without addressing these issues. ICN strongly supports the call for strategic investments in the health workforce, viewing such expenditures as investments, not costs.

Investment in nursing education is paramount, expanding capacities of nursing education programs, supporting continuing education, and leveraging digital health. A well-educated nursing force is adept at leading community-based mental health services, managing NCDs, and driving down premature mortality rates, directly impacting SDG3 target 3.4.1.

Secondly, nurses' roles should be expanded and optimized. Advanced practice nurses and nurse-led clinics have shown efficacy in improving access to quality care, vital for achieving UHC and health-related SDGs. Empowering nurses to practice to the full extent of their education can significantly alleviate the pressure on primary health care systems.

Thirdly, we advocate for the implementation of favorable work environments. The Charter for Change highlights the necessity of providing a safe, respectful, and supportive workplace for nurses. Retention of the nursing workforce is just as critical

as its growth. By ensuring occupational safety, competitive remuneration, and pathways for professional development, we can safeguard our healthcare systems' sustainability.

Furthermore, leveraging the digital transformation in healthcare is crucial. Nurses are pivotal in implementing and maximizing the benefits of digital health, especially in rural and underserved areas. Investment should extend to educating nurses in digital health, contributing to a person-centric approach that enhances health system efficiency and outreach.

Lastly, the pursuit of UHC and SDGs requires robust financing mechanisms. Investing in nursing is cost-effective and beneficial for health system resilience. We urge Member States to consider dedicated funding streams to support nursing services, education, and professional development, reinforcing the health workforce's financial protection aspect.

Specifically, we call for:

1. Implement the recommendations highlighted in ICN's 2023 reports - 'Recover to Rebuild' and 'Charter for Change' which focus on protecting nurses, strengthening health systems and ensuring resilient recovery.
2. Implement and report on the recommendations outlined in the WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery and support the proposed development of the second WHO State of the World's Nursing report.
3. Leverage ICN's resources and insights. Our commitment is to the global advancement of nursing, and our recent reports offer valuable insights.
4. Establish a Chief Nurse position at WHO SEARO and a Government Chief Nurse in every country in South-East Asia, ensuring dedicated nursing leadership at national levels.

ICN urges all stakeholders present to acknowledge the undeniable value of the nursing workforce and to pledge their commitment to the transformative actions needed to ensure the health and well-being of populations globally.

## Links

- ICN 2023 Recover to Rebuild: Investing in the nursing workforce for health system effectiveness - [https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-07/ICN\\_Recover-to-Rebuild\\_report\\_EN.pdf](https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-07/ICN_Recover-to-Rebuild_report_EN.pdf)
- ICN 2023 Charter for Change - [https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-07/ICN\\_IND\\_2023\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-07/ICN_IND_2023_Report_EN.pdf)