

WHO Europe

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Joint Statement by NSA: The European Forum of National Nursing and Midwifery Associations (EFNNMA), The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and The European Nurse Student Association (ENSA)

Agenda item 3

The Second European Programme of Work, 2026-2030 – «United Action for Better Health» (EPW2)

The European Forum of National Nursing and Midwifery Associations (EFNNMA), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the European Nurse Student Association (ENSA) fully support the proposed Second European Programme of Work 2026-2030 – “United Action for Better Health.” The EPW2 builds on the first EPW 2020-2025 while recognizing that renewed effort is required to achieve SDG 3 and Universal health coverage. As non-state actors we are committed to engage in co-creation to improve the health and mental health of people and communities in the WHO Euro Region.

Across all the EPW2 prioritized programmes nurses, midwives and other health professionals are critical to achieving the SDG health related goals. Leadership by and for nurses and midwives at the WHO Regional Office and at country level is critical to achieving goals of the EPW2. The position of the Nursing and Midwifery Team must be recognized, upheld and supported despite limited resources.

Resilient and sustainable health systems are crucial for achieving universal health coverage (UHC), reducing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health conditions, and providing high-quality and safe care. However, health systems across Europe are significantly weakened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with inadequate investment in systems and health professionals. The region is now grappling with a mental health crisis and moral injury within the healthcare workforce and an expected shortage of 11 million health and care professionals by 2030. This crisis demands urgent political action and heavy investment to restore trust and transform national health policies to meet the health needs of the populations.

The road to UHC is through primary health care. We support Primary Health Care as a special initiative as it is time to ramp up transformation of health systems across the region to Primary Healthcare models. Nurses and midwives in primary health care settings- health centres, homes, schools and communities work close to patients and their families. Yet, their formal scope of practice is often restricted limiting their contribution to the health and well-being of the communities they serve. Regulatory reform is needed to enable nurses and midwives to work to the full scope of their education and training and give them greater autonomy in their work. This autonomy relies on the recognition of their level of education, which must be provided within university institutions to ensure quality and the empowerment of the professions. New innovative nurse-led/midwife led models of care are needed to optimize health care efficiency, effectiveness and to maintain nurses and midwives in the workforce.

The high prevalence of violence against women and girls in Europe is alarming. We welcome the EPW2 special initiative to address violence against women and girls. It is necessary to raise awareness of this unacceptable societal problem and to create legal, structural and

cultural change where dignity and rights of women and girls are respected and protected. The nursing and midwifery workforces are highly gendered with over 85% women. The recently launched WHO Europe Study on Mental Health of Nurses and Doctors (MeND) shows a high incidence of violence in healthcare and female nurses and doctors are especially vulnerable. Violence contributes to mental health conditions, burnout, disability and leaving the workforce. We are prepared to work with WHO Euro and Member states to reduce violence against women and girls in general and to protect nurses and midwives against violence in the workplace.

EFNNMA is a non-state actor representing the nursing and midwifery professions in the WHO European Region.

ICN is a federation of more than 140 national nurses associations representing 30 million of nurses worldwide.

ENSA is a non-state actor and the only organization representing nursing students in the WHO European Region.