

73 rd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 13–15 October 2026

Item 5(g) Building resilient health systems to advance universal health coverage and ensure health security in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 30 million nurses worldwide, welcomes this progress report. WHO's State of the World's Nursing 2025 projects a global nursing shortage of 4.1 million by 2030, with around 70% concentrated in the African and Eastern Mediterranean regions. As the largest occupational group in health, nurses are central to service delivery, from facility-based care to integrated, people-centred primary health care.

ICN underscores that equitable access to primary health care, including nursing services, is essential to improving health and wellbeing. Yet insufficient investment, shortages and maldistribution of nurses remain significant barriers to reorienting health systems towards primary health care. ICN calls on Member States to accelerate implementation of the WHO Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery, now extended to 2030.

ICN's evidence reinforces the urgency of action. Our 2025 survey of National Nurses Association Presidents identifies serious concerns around workforce sustainability, including staffing, retention, remuneration, workplace violence and nurses' health and wellbeing. Our 2024 International Nurses Day report, *The Economic Power of Care*, demonstrates the wider health, social and economic case for investing in nursing, while ICN's Nursing and Primary Health Care report sets out practical actions to strengthen nursing's contribution to PHC.

Building on this evidence, ICN's 2026 International Nurses Day report, *Empowered Nurses Save Lives*, calls for investment in adequate staffing and skill mix; safe and decent working conditions; education and professional development; supportive organizational cultures; wellbeing; fair compensation; and nursing leadership.

ICN urges Member States to translate this evidence into action through funded national nursing workforce plans, strengthened retention and safe staffing, and strong nursing leadership, including Chief Nursing Officer positions. Nurses and national

nurses associations must be meaningfully involved in health workforce policy and planning.

Investing in nursing is central to resilient primary health care, universal health coverage and sustainable economic and social development. ICN stands ready to support Member States and WHO with its evidence, expertise and global network.