15 January 2020 - Nurses and midwives make up more than half of the health workforce. Evidence suggests that adequate numbers of well-educated nurses are particularly well suited to tackling the rise in communicable and noncommunicable diseases, and that they significantly contribute to reducing morbidity and mortality rates and to reducing adverse health events.

Progress in strengthening nursing workforce in the Region has been slow despite the continued global and regional efforts to address the challenges facing nursing and midwifery. In the past 10 years, the density of nurses and midwives has not changed in almost all countries, it decreased in 11 countries; and the ratio of nurses and midwives to doctors has decreased in nine countries in the same period. This trend is likely to continue if the current level of production capacities is maintained. Most countries of the region are struggling with underutilization of nurses, insufficient investment in recruiting, training and retention of nurses, the poor working conditions, and increased migration and brain drain.

Building on the current attention and emphasis on the importance of the health workforce as a key component of the health system to accelerate achieving universal health coverage, a call for action was adopted by the 66th session of the Regional Committee October 2019. The call for action urges Member States to:

- Develop and implement national strategies and action plans to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce.
- Enhance work environments to allow nurses to use their knowledge and skills productively through well-defined standards of nursing practice, appropriate remuneration, opportunities for career development and continuing professional development.
- Ensure routine health information systems collect data on the nursing and midwifery workforce, for strategic planning, policy development and management.
- Undertake labour market analysis, and develop strategies to attract and retain the workforce, including elevating the status and value afforded to nursing and midwifery professions.
- Strengthen the primary health care nursing workforce by defining and expanding nurses' roles and scopes of practice to maximize the utilization of their capacities.
- Reorient nursing and midwifery education and training, emphasizing primary care competencies, and develop accreditation systems to ensure the quality of education at all levels.
- Develop specific country-level activities to mark 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

Related links

Technical discussion paper: EM/RC66/4
Strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
English | Arabic | French

Resolution: EM/RC66/R.3
Strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
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