



Press release

World Health Day 2020: Let's show our support for nurses and midwives

7 April 2020 -- The theme of this year's World Health Day is "Support nurses and midwives". It acknowledges the critical role that nurses and midwives play in keeping the world healthy and is a call to world leaders to invest in nurses and midwives as part of their commitment to health for all. Nurses and midwives are the backbone of any health system and key to the achievement of universal health coverage. They play a critical role in health promotion, disease prevention and the delivery of care in all settings. It is estimated that an additional 9 million nurses and midwives are needed if the world is to achieve universal health coverage by 2030.

In the midst of this global coronavirus pandemic, nurses and other health workers are at the forefront of the COVID-19 response, providing high quality, respectful treatment and care, leading community dialogue to address fears and questions and, in some instances, collecting data for clinical studies. They often work in challenging circumstances providing care to patients and risking their own lives while they fight for the lives of others. "The current situation makes the theme of the World Health Day and the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife even more relevant and meaningful as we acknowledge and pay tribute to all health workers. We need to ensure that all nurses and midwives operate in an environment where they are safe from harm, including those providing services in countries in emergency. And we need to ensure that they have access to a functioning health care service," said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Nurses and midwives constitute more than 50% of the global health workforce and more than 50% of the shortfall in the global health workforce. They provide essential care to diverse groups of people, including refugees and displaced populations. However, in spite of continuing global and regional efforts to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce, countries are still facing severe shortages of this cadre of health workers.

"If we do not strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce, health care systems will be unable to provide efficient and quality care. Investing in nurses and midwives improves health, promotes gender equality and supports economic growth. On this World Health Day, as we acknowledge the critical contribution of nurses and midwives in improving health systems I call on Member States to accelerate efforts and invest in nurses and midwives to address the alarming shortage in this vital health

workforce, which is compromising the efficiency and quality of health services in our Region,” Dr Al-Mandhari stated.

On World Health Day, WHO will launch the first-ever State of the World’s Nursing Report 2020. The report will provide a global picture of the nursing workforce and support evidence-based planning to optimize the contributions of this workforce to improve health and well-being for all. The report will set the agenda for data collection, policy dialogue, research and advocacy, and investment in the health workforce for generations to come. A similar report on the Midwifery workforce will be launched in 2021.