



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific



Urgent need for investment in nursing

COVID-19 pandemic puts need for nurses into sharp relief

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A global shortage of nurses is highlighted in a report from the World Health Organization (WHO), released on World Health Day, at a time when nursing staff and other health professionals are working around the clock responding to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The WHO report *State of the World's Nursing 2020* projects that, without action, there will be a worldwide shortage of 4.6 million nurses by 2030 unless greater investment in nursing is made now.

For 2018, WHO estimates there was a total shortfall of 350 000 nurses in countries and areas of the Western Pacific Region, with the most acute shortages in low- and middle-income countries.

“The case for investing in the nursing workforce has never been clearer,” said Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific. “Right now, nurses are on the front lines of the COVID-19 fight, working tirelessly to save lives and protect others in their community. Governments across the Western Pacific Region must invest in strengthening their nursing workforce as an essential part of preparedness for health challenges such as emerging infectious diseases, but also the health challenges brought about by climate change, ageing populations and a growing burden of noncommunicable diseases.”

State of the World's Nursing 2020 paints a picture of an unevenly distributed nursing workforce across the Region, composed largely of women aged under 35 years who have left their countries of origin to work in higher-income countries.

One in three nurses in this Region works outside of the country where they were born or trained. The Western Pacific Region has the highest proportion of women nurses (95%) in the world, and half (50.7%) are under the age of 35. The Region also has fewer nursing graduates per 100 000 population at 20.6 compared to the global average of 22.6.

According to the report, the number of nursing graduates around the world will need to increase by an average 8% per year. Governments will also need to address inequities in workforce distribution and pay, outdated education models, limited career pathways and weak regulation if they are to train and retain enough nurses to respond to current and future health needs. Investments in quality training and ensuring adequate pay and decent working conditions will improve health outcomes, promote gender equality and support economic growth.

For this year's World Health Day, the *State of the World's Nursing 2020* report has been produced by WHO in partnership with the International Council of Nurses and the global Nursing Now campaign, as well as support from governments and other partners.

The report provides a global picture of the nursing workforce, using data and standardized indicators from 193 countries and areas, including 31 in the Western Pacific Region.

At the World Health Assembly in May 2019, ministers of health from across the globe designated 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife. It marks 200 years since the birth of Florence Nightingale—the founder of modern nursing and recognizes the critical contribution these professions make to global health.

A similar report on the midwifery workforce will be launched in 2021.

Notes to editors:

View the full report and executive summary [here](#). Visit our World Health Day 2020 page [here](#) and check out our [regional page on COVID-19](#). Here is the link to the [International Year of the Nurse and Midwife](#) page.