



EFN Policy Statement on the Key Role of Nurses for Preparedness

Preparedness is high on the European Commission's political agenda, reflecting the growing number of crises threatening European safety and stability, including pandemics, geopolitical tensions and conflicts, hybrid and cybersecurity threats, climate change and natural disasters. As we cannot be prepared for any crisis without a strong and resilient EU and European nursing workforce, EFN has already called for many years for concrete and tangible actions, both at the EU and Member States' levels, especially through the [EFN Report on Member States Preparedness on Ebola](#) (2015), the [EFN Report on Lessons Learned with Ebola and COVID-19](#) (2020), and the [Discussion paper on Training of Healthcare professionals: an important pandemic preparation](#) (2023), developed by EFN with other key health stakeholders within the HERA Civil Society Forum.

Therefore, EFN welcomes the publication of the [EU Preparedness Union Strategy](#) (2025), which calls on the European Commission to work together with the Member States to ensure the availability and mobility of highly qualified healthcare professionals for emergency preparedness.

Now is the time to move from words to action! Nurses and a well-functioning healthcare system will always be a fundamental element of every crisis preparedness regardless of the type of crisis. A strong preparedness requires a robust and prepared Health care. Rising expenditure on armaments and defense must not be at the expense of the necessary investments in our core welfare. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us some very painful lessons about being adequately prepared for any health crisis. Nurses are still suffering the COVID-19 pandemic's repercussions throughout the EU and Europe, with huge nursing workforce shortages, low pay that does not reflect the nurses' competences and responsibilities, and unacceptable working conditions, including due to epidemic levels of violence and the constant exposure to other occupational safety and health (OSH) hazards. As a result, a significant share of the EU nursing workforce has already left the profession after COVID-19, and with increasing levels of burnout, many more still think about leaving, unless concrete policy interventions at the EU and National level are urgently implemented.

On the other hand, with the prospect of a wider war in Europe becoming more concrete day-after-day, the EU and the Member States massively increasing GDP spending in defence. But this, despite the lessons which EU and National leaders should have learnt after the COVID-19 pandemic, is coming at the cost of healthcare expenditure, with the European Commission's EU4Health programme and National healthcare budgets already facing massive cuts (€1 billion

out of €5.3 billion were cut from the EU4Health programme). This is extremely worrying, as the implementation of concrete policy interventions to tackle the serious challenges to the resilience of the EU and European nursing workforce must come with adequate financing.

As such, EU, National and International nursing associations and policy makers must not forget that healthcare systems and preparedness for any crisis are inextricably linked, and our healthcare systems depend on the resilience of our nursing workforce. Systematically assess and test healthcare systems to enhance the competence of nurses in disaster nursing.

Therefore, the EFN is calling on the EU Institutions and the EU and European Member States to:

1. Recognise that investing in nursing workforce is necessary to ensure broader EU and European preparedness towards any crisis. Frontline nurses play a critical role in cybersecurity preparedness and civil defence, and will play a crucial role in case of military conflict. Therefore, the healthcare workforce should not come in second place with respect to cybersecurity and defence investments.
2. Move away from “Subsidiarity”, recognising that achieving EU and European preparedness to any crisis through the development of a strong and resilient nursing workforce is a shared competence and duty of the EU and the Member States.
3. The EU should develop an EU Contingency Plan, with the aim to ensuring preparedness to any crisis by facilitating coordination and alignment of national preparedness efforts. Additionally, this should mandate Member States to develop national contingency plans. Both EU and National contingency plans should consider the nursing workforce as the backbone for preparedness to any crisis. To explore the establishment of a movable nursing workforce and mechanism that the EU can call upon to assist health systems response to crises.
4. Investing in public health during peacetime strengthens emergency preparedness during crises. A healthy population eases the pressure on the healthcare system in times of crisis, when resources are strained.
5. Invest in mandatory training in contingency plans and preparedness. Furthermore high-quality in-service Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and specialised training will ensure the availability of well-trained frontline nurses who will be prepared to deal with the health crisis that would follow a possible war outbreak, or any other crisis.
6. Improve the retention of nurses through the development 3 key EU Directives which fall under Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) on which the EU has clear legislative competence, having developed already more than 20 individual directives:

- i. an EU Directive on Safe Staffing Levels (nurses to patients ratio) – this is key to improve the quality and safety of care in the EU and Europe!
 - ii. an EU Directive on Zero Tolerance on Violence against nurses and allied healthcare professionals – this is key to harmonise the many existing national level initiatives, in line with the [EFN Policy Statement on Zero Tolerance to Violence Against Nurses \(2025\)](#).
 - iii. an EU directive on Psychosocial Risks on the Workplace – with a broader reach, tackling the occupational safety and health hazards in the workplace which are leading to high levels of burnout and workforce attrition.
7. Empower European nurses to work to their full scope of practice, including by investing in the development and implementation of [Advanced Practice Nursing \(APN\)](#), and by [extending prescribing rights to nurses](#), as it is already the case in several European countries. This would ensure the resilience of the European healthcare systems in the event of war, which would require doctors to care for injured soldiers on the frontline, thus leaving other patients without any care.
 8. As nurses play a crucial role in civil defence, upscale existing national level good practices in collaboration with EFN and the National Nurses Associations (NNAs), learning from countries like Sweden which have already informed nurses of their wartime placement, which is key to enable a quick transition of the healthcare systems to the emergency setting.
 9. To implement these policies, make adequate levels of EU financing available through existing and/or innovative funding streams, such as the [Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#) and [EU4Health](#). Furthermore, additional funding should be allocated in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which is undergoing revision, as the current one will expire in 2027.

Further readings:

- EFN Policy Statement on Zero Tolerance on Violence Against Nurses (2025). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Zero-Tolerance-on-Violence-Against-Nurses-April-2025-1.pdf>
- EFN Report on Member States Preparedness on Ebola (2015). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/EFN-Report-MS-Preparedness-Ebola-Final-Sept.2015.pdf>
- EFN Report on Lessons Learned with Ebola and COVID-19 (2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3e76mZn>
- EU Preparedness Union Strategy (2025). Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/526806b6-c4e1-43d1-81b7-947308efbab1_en?filename=eu-preparedness-union-strategy.pdf

- Hera Civil Society Forum (2023). Discussion paper on Training of Healthcare professionals: an important pandemic preparation. Available at: https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/4d986d72-b138-41c6-84a4-604e4716b375_en?filename=hera_csf_wg3_hcp-training_en.pdf
- International Council of Nurses (2025). International Nurses Day 2025: Caring for nurses strengthens economies. Available at: https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2025-04/ICN_IND2025_report_EN_A4_FINAL_0.pdf

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