



## EFN Position Statement on Violence and Harassment<sup>1</sup> Against Nurses

Nurses are at the frontline of addressing many forms of violence, due to the role they play in keeping patients and communities safe. However, nurses are themselves more likely to be exposed to verbal, emotional or physical (including sexual) violence at their workplace in comparison with other professions. Most violence in nurses' workplaces is perpetrated by patients and visitors with evidence that this worsens in disaster and conflict situations. This is unfortunately a global problem crossing borders. With the COVID-19 pandemic, this negative phenomenon has been on the rise across many European countries, adding to the stress toll that nurses are already experiencing for being at the frontline of care during this crisis. The violence and harassment of the nurses happens due to two overarching reasons:

- Firstly, nurses are at the frontline of healthcare, 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, at the bedside of the patient. That may result in discrimination, harassment or violence stemming from patients/family members and/or from other healthcare professionals, particularly those with greater power. This occurs due to gender-based reasons and where nurses are not respected or included in the decision-making processes, their social and professional status is low and their role is under-recognised. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic many nurses have been discriminated and isolated by their communities for being perceived as COVID-19 infected and spreaders of the virus. Moreover, as studies have shown social isolation and lockdown due to COVID-19 have increased the incidences of domestic violence mainly against women.
- Secondly, nursing is a female-driven and female dominant profession. Globally, WHO estimate that women make up 70% of the health and social sector (WHO, 2019) and 89% of nurses are female (WHO, 2020). This entails that all the violence, harassment and discrimination that women in general may suffer may apply to most nurses, too. 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or sexual violence by a non-partner. Female nurses are unfortunately at risk of experiencing violence and harassment in their professional environment and private-

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<sup>1</sup> The term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment - ILO definition (Ref. C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019)

life spheres. Structural forms of inequality also make all women likely to face systemic inequality and discrimination (UN Women, 2020). Female Nurses tend to be the ones also in charge of domestic tasks at their household and take care of their elderly and children in their families. It is important to consider how different factors can intersect to shape risk, and ensure all health professionals are protected from violence, for example considering how male-nurses, older nurses or nurses with disabilities may be at risk of violence and the steps required to address this.

Violence and harassment against nurses are not new and is totally unacceptable, as it has an enormous negative impact on nurses' psychological and physical well-being and on their job motivation, with nurses' leaving the profession, and puts the quality of care and patients' safety at risk. Therefore, it is time to act! Nurses need to be protected from any kinds of gender related violence and discrimination.

Taking into account all of the above, the EFN, in the representation of its Membership, asks the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers to:

- Recognise the rising problem of violence, harassment and discrimination against nurses at EU level and raise awareness on the need to stop it among Member States and EU citizens.
- Make the reduction of violence and harassment against nurses a number one priority of the national, regional, local and EU political agendas, and make sure to implement policies and legislation that promote safety and the well-being of nurses.
- Strengthen the framework and the working condition in the healthcare sector, which is key both at organisational and financial level to reduce the risk of violence and harassment, even in difficult working environments.
- Engage with nurses and their representatives, through a tripartite social dialogue, at national and European level to plan the provision of adequate support for nurses against violence and harassment.
- Promote the importance of safe and inclusive workplaces for all health care professionals by implementing preventive measures against violence and harassment at national, organisational and personal level.
- Strengthen nursing curriculums to support and empower nurses to deal with diverse forms of violence and harassment.
- Promote the training of nurses and other healthcare professionals on the risks of violence and harassment and how to prevent, identify and cope with it.
- Fund initiatives and projects aimed at National Nursing Associations that are committed to tackling this problem in their countries focusing also in political and legal solutions.
- Foster the role of the European Commission's DG Justice in monitoring and taking actions in this problem. DG Justice could provide assistance to the National Nursing

Associations in echoing their demands and requests for help to the EU Member States governments.

### **Further Readings**

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- International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on "Violence and Harassment" (C190). 2019. [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:3999810:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3999810:NO)
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*EFN Position Statement on Gender-Based Violence Against Nurses – April 2021*

