



## European Nursing Council

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### **Position Paper of the European Nursing Council (ENC) on the issues faced by the healthcare Professionals as a second wave of COVID-19 hits Europe.**

The European Nursing Council (ENC) is the only mono-professional association bringing together nurses' and midwives' regulatory bodies at the European level. Its members are national institutions ensuring nursing regulation, patient safety and patient rights in their respective countries. Several Working Groups ensure an efficient following up of all legislative proposals of relevance to the nursing and midwifery. ENC strives to communicate responsible and professional information about all issues touching nursing, regulation, patient rights, patient safety, public health and safety, to the institutions and other bodies of the European Union. Our objective is to make sure that public health related concerns are seriously taken into consideration into every piece of European legislation. Naturally, nursing-related healthcare and patient rights are our first and paramount concern.

ENC would like to acknowledge the European institutions for the work done during this unprecedented pandemic. As explained in the European Commission recommendation of the 28th of October 2020, the definition of health policy as well as the organization and delivery of health measures remain a national competence. However, as a European representation for nurses, we should continue our work at the European level, together with the institutions, in order to provide a better response for all the health workers and especially the nurses in the European Union.

#### **Healthcare professionals as core elements of our healthcare systems' resilience**

**Faced with unprecedented health crisis, the EU should be grateful towards its Nurses.** For months now, they have been at the front line to protect people's health and lives. They have responded to today's challenge with courage, strength and dedication. They have been providing human connection and dignity to help the sick and help them navigate through their illness, solitude and fear. Some of them have been infected by the virus and selflessly even paid the ultimate price.

In that context, they have rightfully been applauded in many European cities, every night, for months, to salute their sacrifice, as the heroes that they truly are. **Nevertheless, despite the global consensus to recognize our profession's social utility, it is with great dismay that one can witness the revival of disdain and disrespect towards professionals of our sector in several Member States.**

Healthcare professionals are core elements of our healthcare systems' resilience. During the first wave of the pandemic, they paid a heavy price. Therefore, **we ask for a real support, including moral support, of nurses who take and took part in the containing of the pandemic situation and consequently fell ill.** It is vital to find how can the health sector and the Member States could help and support them. The European Union should help us find a durable solution. For example, a

**mandatory recovery period could be put in place in case of infection for every nurses and healthcare professional.**

Furthermore, several Member States are facing 'Emergency state' in which rights can be limited in order to tackle down the COVID-19 crisis. However, **it is of a paramount important that nurses and other healthcare providers need additional legal protection.**

We also ask for a guide for health professionals at EU level. Indeed, the number of COVID screenings is not enough in some parts of the Union which represents a significant danger. Several patients arriving for elective and acute surgery are not screened in all institutions. Even some workers who show symptoms are not screened or sent home without screening. **COVID screening of patients admitted to hospital should be mandatory at EU level.**

**Nurses must have the means to protect our safety**

**Investing in health should never be seen or framed as a cost.** The current health crisis has strongly cast light on the link between health and economy. It shows that saving money in the short term, may have devastating effect in the long term, and consequently lead to a sanitary predicament no country should ever face.

We do understand that the future of the economy of the European Union is at stake. However, it doesn't mean that our sector, which is capital for public health and safety, should be neglected. Public health and safety are indispensable elements for a healthy and growing economy.

At this very particular moment, as a second wave of virus outbreak hits Europe, as stakeholders' representative of the healthcare sector, **we ask that the European Institutions once and for all, see health expenditure related budget as investment for the wellbeing of our societies and not as an unnecessary cost.**

**It is now high time to reinforce healthcare facilities and provide the right equipment which will indeed allow Nurses to operate in a less stressful environment and provide the rightful attention that patients demand.**

**We also need the creation of priority protection for medical staff, provision of wellbeing during working hours.** We should give the possibility to nurses to practice their duty in the best conditions possible.

Regarding the vaccination, we would like to thank once again the European Commission to have put our profession in the prior categories that have to be protected since we are working on the front line. As it has been put forward in several communications, *"Vaccination, once a safe and efficient vaccine is available, will play a central role in saving lives. Ensuring the availability of a safe vaccine for all European remains a top priority of the European Commission. As Europe learns to live with the pandemic, it is imperative that the Member States follow a common vaccination strategy for vaccine deployment."* **We would like to remember that this is important to understand that it is the nurses who provide the vaccines and that we should be prepared and take into consideration for the preparation of the plan.**

We acknowledge the proposed actions like the fact that Member states should ensure the capacity of vaccination services to deliver COVID-19 vaccines, including a skilled workforce, and medical and personal protective equipment.

### **Nurses' formations must be harmonised**

ENC has always stood for loyal and constructive collaboration with the European institutions, sharing with them the dream of a United Europe progressive, creative and growing for the benefit of its citizens and our patients. In that spirit we would like to bring to your attention the following points, deemed to be of the highest importance for all our membership: In 2019, there were 4.45 million nurses and midwives employed in the European Union, counting both professional and assistant nurses and midwives. This corresponds to half a million more nurses and midwives employed in the EU in 2019 compared to 2012, with a steady increase over this period. **Yet, quantity does not always come with quality.**

Thus, we feel that there is a need for initiatives, including at the European Union level, to better focus on nursing education, training and continuous professional development. **As guarantor of patients' safety, we think it is vital to allow on the one hand to scale up the number of Nurses in order to face with the surging demands due to the current pandemic, while, on the other hand, setting an harmonised and specialised training framework for Nurses in every Member States, in order to allow the formation of qualified and decent professionals that requires our sector.**

Every European patient deserves an access of equivalent quality, which means that **every healthcare provider should benefit from cutting-edge and equivalent continuous training. This training should also include from now on a formation regarding the pandemic knowledge in order to avoid catastrophic situation like the one we are facing at this precise moment.**

### **More European solidarity**

**Volens nolens, infectious diseases know no borders.** In an integrated European Union, it is therefore of the utmost importance to deal with this issue together, in such a way that it enables a close collaboration and mutually strengthens our health systems. More solidarity is required between Member States in order to mitigate this virus' spread. **In practical terms, the European Nursing Council strongly encourages the cross-border exchanges of both patients and Nurses when healthcare facilities of one country are overwhelmed.**

Furthermore, **we think it is crucial to reinforce European Health interoperability.** The latter may be used to diffuse to spread concrete achievements of the European Union in times of crisis, **which would indeed benefit to the European project overall.**

ENC would like to acknowledge the upcoming project of the European Commission for the involvement in a more united Europe, and the first building blocks of a European Health Union. This should help nurses all around the EU in their daily work, their formation, and for subsidies.

**Nurses' expertise should be front and center in providing reliable and trustworthy information on the virus**

Health is by definition vital to anyone, and the current COVID crisis has also brought to the fore the struggle expressed by the general public to find accurate and reliable information on the virus. Throughout media, the public debate has been fomented by a plethora of so-called experts or incumbents, who have flooded EU citizens with misinformation and unreliable indications, mostly undocumented, on the spread, consequences and first and foremost on the ways to mitigate the pandemic in our daily interactions. As day-to-day workers at the front line against this virus, **we truly believe that both the EU institutions and its populations, should, in fact, put their trust between the hands of healthcare professionals, such as Nurses.**

**Strong of our scholarly education in the field of sanitation, and relevant professional expertise, we are indeed the only legitimate source of information, the general public and political representatives should seek and rely on. In practical terms, we should use Nurses' knowledge in order to raise awareness on how to properly wear masks, on social distancing and other relevant advices. In that context, the European Nursing Council, encourages EU institutions bodies to thoroughly lean on our expertise in the near future in order to hamper the spread of this dreadful virus.**