

HWF Team



## Nursing and midwifery workforce: a key component in achieving UHC

### Rationale

The attainment of global health goals, including universal health coverage and health security, hinges greatly on the availability, quality, and equitable distribution of a fit-for-purpose health workforce, especially nurses and midwives who play a key role in providing health services to the population. Improving the quality of nursing and midwifery education and practice, scaling up capacity and strengthening professional leadership at the frontlines need concerted efforts.

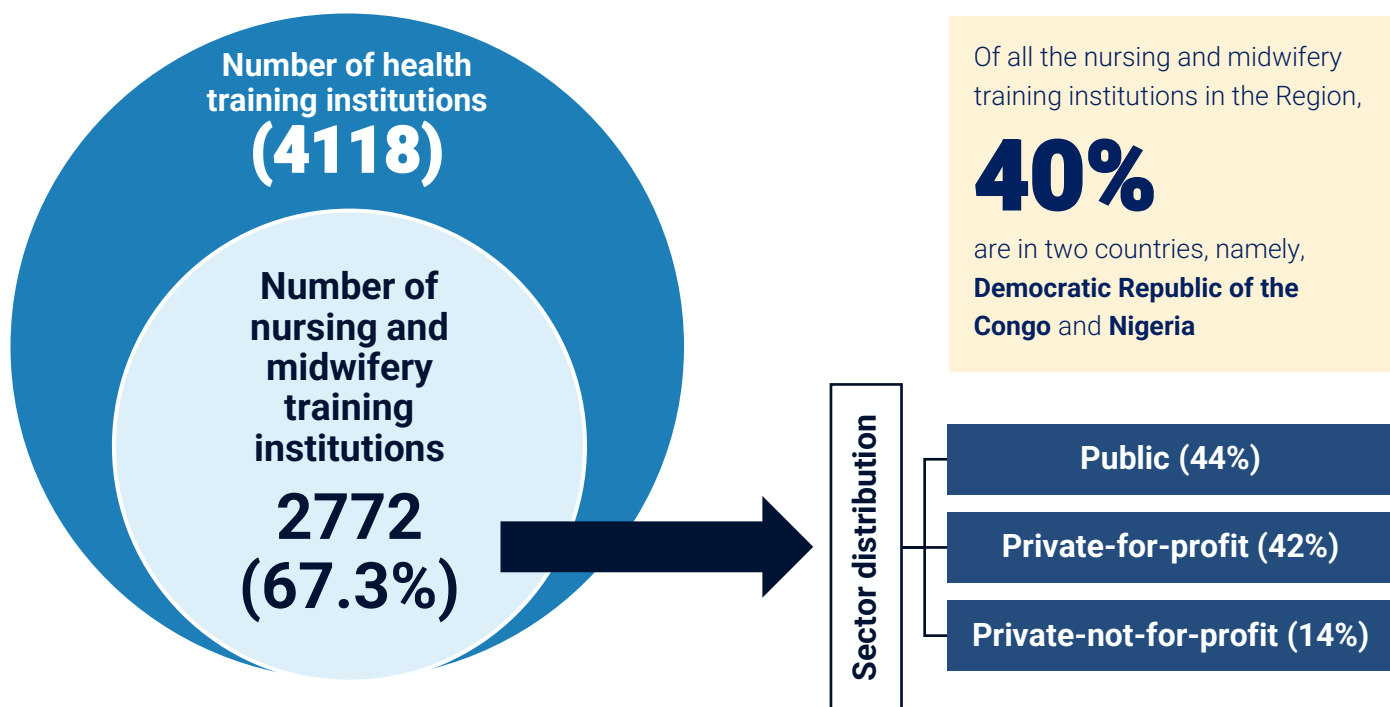
### Key messages

- The African Region had at least **2772** training institutions for nursing and midwifery in 2020.
- **34** out of the 47 countries (72.3% of Member States) had a nationally defined **scope of practice** for nurses and midwives in 2020.
- In the Region, **there were an estimated 17.78** nurses and midwives per 10 000 population in 2020 compared to 11.81 per 10 000 in 2005.
- Comparing the estimated need with the supply trajectory, Africa in 2020 had an estimated **39%** of the **4** million nurses and midwives needed. Under the current trajectory, there could be a **shortage of 3 million nurses and midwives by 2030** if no urgent investments are made.
- Nursing and midwifery research has grown rapidly: papers published on nursing and midwifery within the last decade (from 2010 to 2020) accounted for **82%** of all the papers published in this area since 1976.
- At least **44** out of 47 countries (**94%**) in the Region have established **mechanisms to** regulate nursing and midwifery education and practice.

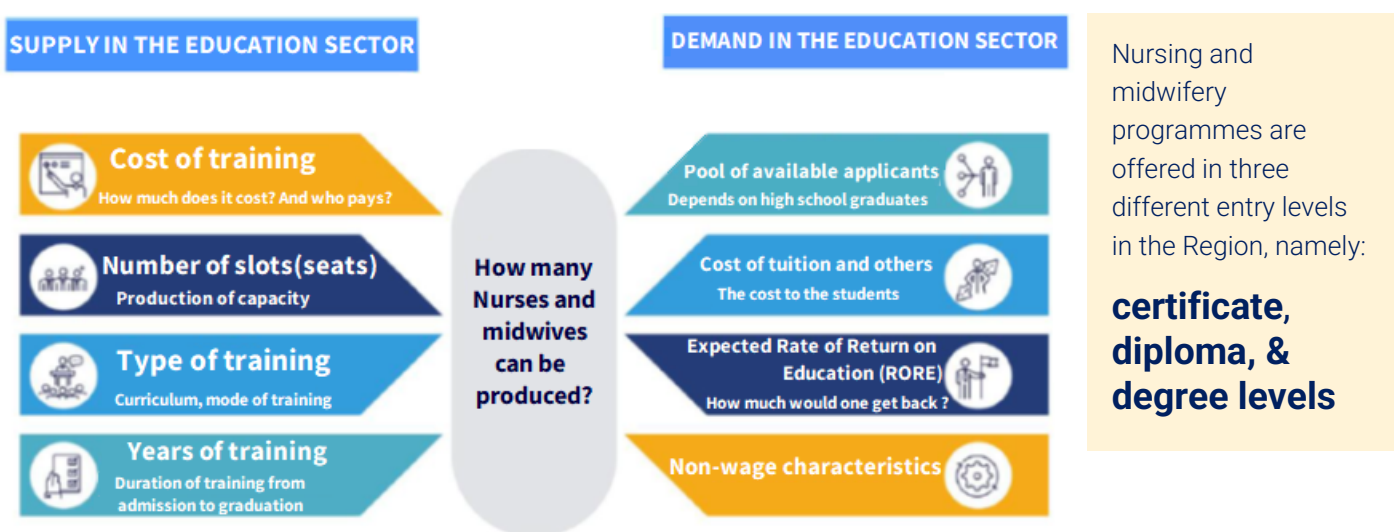
# 1. Education and training

Training and education are critical to the attainment of the **right calibre** and **quantity** of the nursing and midwifery workforce.

**Figure 1:** Health training institutions in the African Region  
(Source: *The State of the Health Workforce in the WHO African Region, 2021*)



**Figure 2:** Push-and-pull factors in nursing and midwifery education



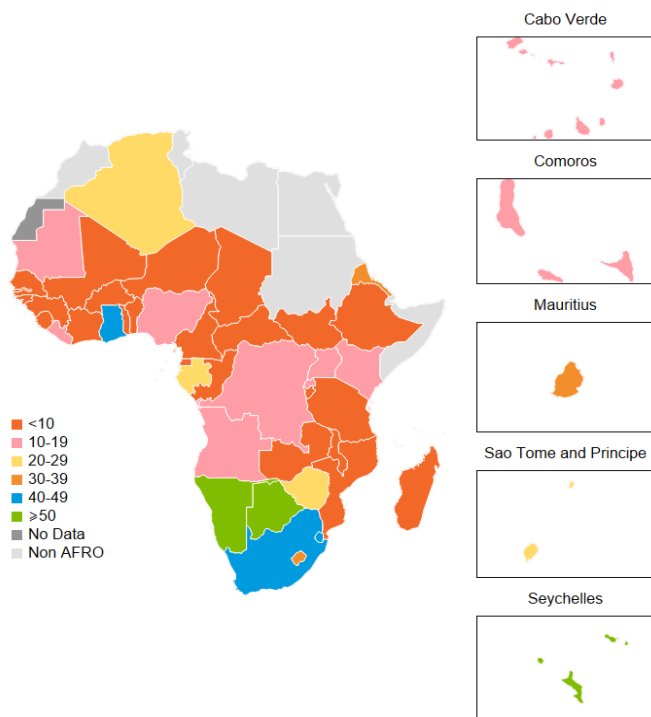
Adapted from *Health Labour Market Analysis Guidebook (WHO, 2021)*

## 2. Labour market outcomes

The term “**supply**” refers to the number of nurses and midwives active (willing to work) in the health labour market. The term “**demand**” refers to the willingness and ability of a country to pay to have nurses and midwives placed in health facilities. The “**need**” for nurses and midwives refers to the number of nurses and midwives required in a country to address the population’s health problems.

**Figure 3:** Density of nurses and midwives per 10 000 population, 2020

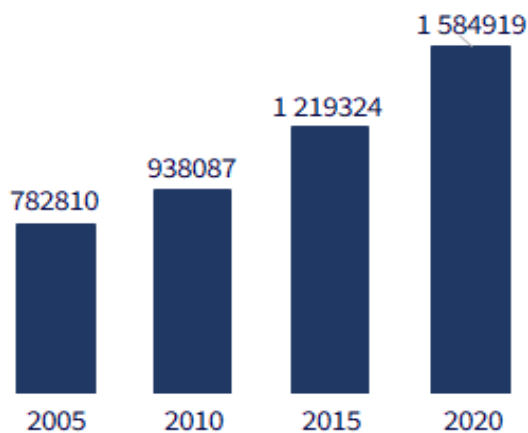
(Source: *The State of the Health Workforce in the WHO African Region, 2021*)



The average regional density of nurses and midwives per 10 000 population increased from 11.81 per 10 000 population in 2005 to **17.78** in 2020. This represented a growth rate of about **3.4%** per annum.

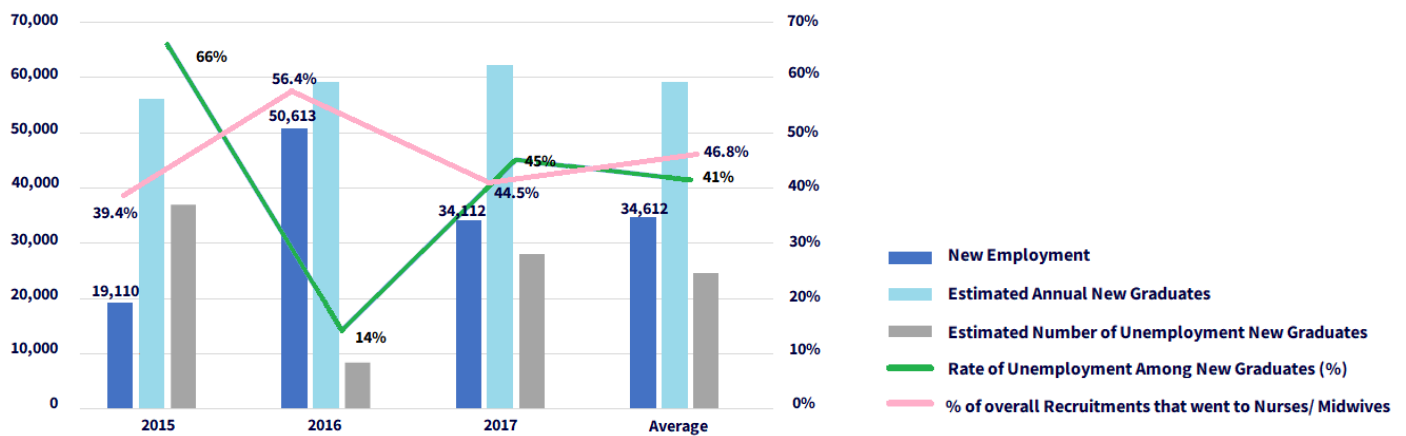
**Figure 4:** Trends in the stock of nurses and midwives, 2005–2020

(Source: *The State of the Health Workforce in the WHO African Region, 2021*)



The estimated overall stock of nurses and midwives across the 47 countries was **1 584 919** by the end of 2020, with **Nigeria** having the highest share of 21% (326 376), followed by **South Africa** (18.1%) and **Ghana** (8.6%). Six countries, namely **Algeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa** account for nearly two thirds (**66%**) of the headcount of nurses and midwives in the African Region.

**Figure 5:** Trends in public sector recruitment and levels of unemployment of nurses and midwives in 39 countries, 2015–2017 (Source: health labour market analyses report)



On average, **71 641** (ranging from 48 482 to 89 763) additional health workers are recruited annually into the public sector. Nurses and midwives accounted for **47%** (ranging from 39% to 56%) of a total recruitment of **214 938 health workers** into the public sector in 39 countries between 2015 and 2017. Thus, an average **35 000 new** public sector nurses and midwives are recruited **per annum**. The **private sector** in the Region contributes approximately **22%** to the employment of nurses and midwives, although the private sector accounts for **39% of training institutions**. Annually, at least **18 000 new** additional nursing and midwifery graduates potentially face the risk of unemployment or underemployment.

**Table 1:** Estimated demand, supply and need for nurses and midwives (in millions)

(Source: National Health Workforce Account database)

Estimates of:	2020	2025	2030
<b>Demand</b>	4.19	3.57	3.99
<b>Need</b>	4.04	4.82	5.78
<b>Supply</b>	1.59	2.01	2.72

Africa in 2020 had an estimated **39%** of its **needed** nurses and midwives. On average, nurses and midwives earn about **US\$ 10 023** and **US\$ 9958 per annum** respectively.

*NB: This estimate is based on pre-COVID -19 data*

### 3. Research output

To gauge the volume of published nursing and midwifery research, **PubMed**, **African Index Medicus**, **Scopus**, and **Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL)** were searched, and papers published since **1976** were retrieved.

**Table 2:** Research output on African nursing and midwifery research (Source: WHO)

Database	Search terms	Search year	No. of papers
MEDLINE	(Nurses or nursing or nurse or nurses') AND (midwives or midwife or midwifery) AND (research) AND (Africa or sub-Saharan Africa or African countries)	1976–2020	675
		2010–2020	560
CINAHL	(Nurses or nursing or nurse or nurses') AND (midwives or midwives or midwifery) AND (research) AND (Africa or sub-Saharan Africa or African countries)	1976–2020	170
		2010–2020	114
PUBMED	(Nursing) AND (Midwifery) AND (Research) AND (Africa)	1976–2020	873
		2010–2020	838

**Table 3:** Distribution of nursing and midwifery publications across Africa (Source: WHO)

S/N	Item	Number	Percentage
	<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>(n = 293)</b>	
1	Nurse/midwife first author from Africa	119	40.6
2	Nurse/midwife first author not from Africa	141	48.1
3	Nurse/midwife second or subsequent author from Africa	33	11.3
	<b>Nurse/midwife first authorship</b>	<b>(n = 119)</b>	
1	East Africa	17	14.2
2	North Africa	7	5.9
3	South Africa	73	61.4
4	West Africa	22	18.5

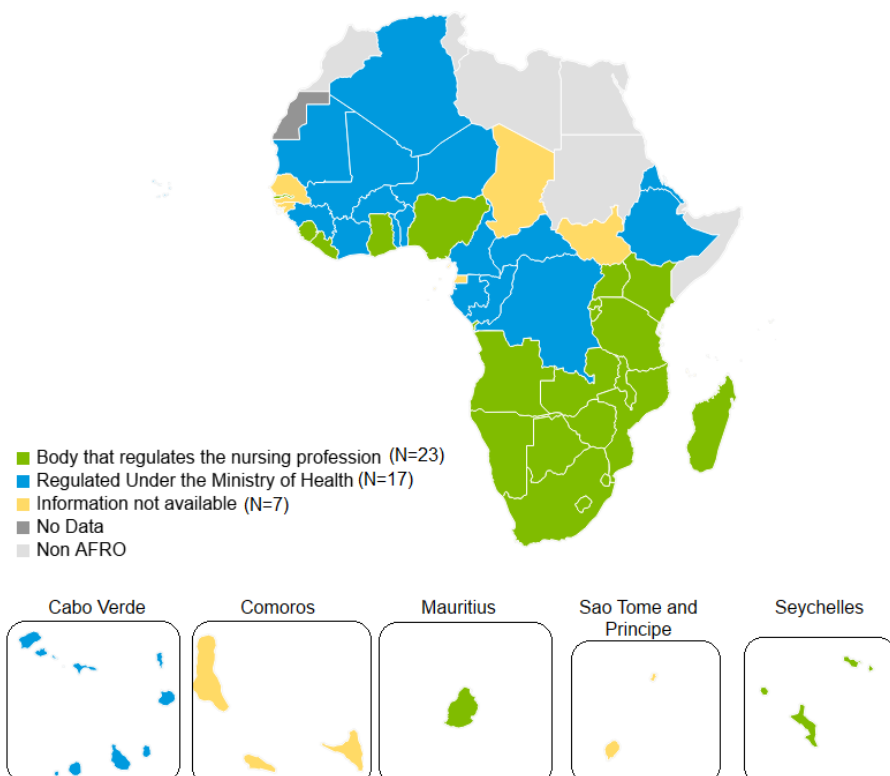
Papers published within the last decade (from 2010 to 2020) accounted for **82%** of all the papers published since 1976, including **67%** in **CINAHL** and **95%** in **PUBMED**. However, nurses or midwives only authored **41%** of the former, while **61%** of the nursing and midwifery research was from the southern African subregion. Nursing and midwifery research has mainly focused on qualitative (**57%**) research in the areas of midwifery/maternal/child health (**43%**), patient experiences (**38%**) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/sexually transmitted infections (**36%**).

## 4. Regulation, governance, and stewardship

To support countries in developing mechanisms for nursing and midwifery regulation, governance systems and stewardship, WHO/AFRO has published significant tools. They include a **Regional Professional Regulatory Framework (RPRF)** to support countries in strengthening regulation and governance of nursing and midwifery, a Plan of Action for Scaling Up Quality Nursing and Midwifery Education and Practice for the African Region, 2012–2022 and recently, the **Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery, 2021–2025**.

**Figure 6:** Status of regulatory bodies in the African Region, 2020

(Source: *The State of the Health Workforce in the WHO African Region, 2021*)



Despite generally limited global action on nursing and midwifery leadership between 2016 and 2020, the African Region saw at least **62% (n = 29 out of 47)** of the countries in the Region establishing or sustaining government chief nursing and midwifery officer (**GCNMO**) or equivalent positions. A majority of these positions are, however, in English-speaking countries with only seven (**24%**) in French-speaking countries.

## 5. Recommendations for policy and strategy

To optimize the contribution of nurses and midwives to the health policy agenda of Africa, Member States and partners should

### Priority interventions and actions

#### 1. Invest to optimize planning and decent employment for nurses and midwives by:

- Undertaking comprehensive nursing and midwifery labour market analyses
- Actively tracking nursing and midwifery labour market outcomes.

#### 2. Accelerate investment in nursing and midwifery education and training by:

- Expanding nursing training opportunities or slots by at least 8% per annum
- Mapping out critical gaps in specialist skills for nurses and midwives
- Urgently instituting (or strengthening as needed) national mechanisms for the regulation of nursing and midwifery.

#### 3. Prioritize nursing and midwifery leadership by:

- Investing in institutionalizing front-line nurse/midwife training
- Optimizing nursing and midwifery leadership especially in countries with no GCNMO
- Developing national strategic directions for nursing and midwifery (NSDNM) aligned with the GSDNM, regional frameworks and national priorities.

#### 4. Optimize nursing and midwifery practice, innovation, and research by:

- Supporting nurses and midwives to practise the full extent of the knowledge and skills acquired
- Investing in nursing and midwifery innovation incubator programmes and systematically documenting lessons learnt
- Promoting the formation of a nursing and midwifery research consortium among institutions.

#### 5. Proposed regional actions, technical products, and initiatives:

- Develop a regional implementation framework for the global strategic direction for nursing and midwifery, 2021–2025
- Organize a regional consultative forum on nursing and midwifery regulation and quality
- In collaboration with WHOCCs, develop a prototype curriculum
- Institutionalize a nursing and midwifery regional policy forum to address pertinent issues and discuss lessons learnt.

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## Sources

- Data on Nursing and Midwifery workforce come from World Health Organization ([Integrated African Health Observatory](#)) National Health Workforce Account database (as of 12 December 2021), the State of World Nursing report, the State of World Midwifery report, the State of health workforce in Africa report, 2021, and reports of various health labour market analyses conducted in 16 countries between 2017 and 2021
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**Contact us at:** [iAHO@who.int](mailto:iAHO@who.int)

**Connect with us on LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/iaho/>

### Fact Sheet Produced by:

Berence Relisy Ouaya Bouesso, Monde Mambimongo Wangou, Bertha Kembabazi, Serge Marcial Bataliack, Adam Ahmat, James Avoka Asamani, Humphrey Cyprian Karamagi, Kasonde Mwinga, Lindiwe Elizabeth Makubalo.