

Agenda 9.7: Advancing health emergency preparedness and response in the WHO South-East Asia Region (SEA/RC76(1))

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Thank you for inviting the United Nations University International Institute for Global Health to this Regional Committee meeting. UNU-IIGH is a think-tank within the UN system that advance evidence-based policy on key issues related to sustainable development and global health - including gender equality, digital health governance, power and accountability, and climate justice.
- Today, as we discuss the health emergencies agenda, we must recognise and respond to the key role of the community-based health workforce, who are disproportionately women. They are often the first responders delivering critical health services during health emergencies, as well as implementing activities stipulated in the 2005 International Health Regulations.
- However, they remain in lower-status positions, often unpaid or underpaid, at heighten the risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and underrepresented in leadership positions, also performing much of unpaid care work, in the health workforce, but also in homes and communities.
- As health emergencies increase, the needs of the community-based workforce, and the women at the heart of it, must be met, including providing personal protective equipment, hygiene, fair remuneration, sanitation, safety, and training.
- UNU-IIGH recognizes the stark inequities between Member States during recent global health crises and has documented the lessons learnt regarding their deeply gendered nature. Yet, considering the recently amended IHR and as negotiations continue on the Pandemic Agreement, it is concerning that gender-inclusive planning and financing remains conspicuous by its absence, especially on issues related to community health workers.
- Honourable Ministers, we count on your leadership to ensure more comprehensive and systematic integration of a gender and equity lens in health emergencies, especially with regards to the community-based workforce.
- UNU-IIGH stands ready to provide support as a platform for knowledge exchange, policy dialogue and consensus-building on these issues.
- Thank you.