

## Nursing and Midwifery in the History of the World Health Organization

1 Nursing and midwifery services form essential elements of all national health systems. Nurses and midwives have been providing essential care for centuries. They form the majority of health personnel in many countries in the world. Their importance has been recognized by WHO from its very beginning. The past perspectives on nursing and midwifery differ significantly from that of the present. As we look at the WHO documents from the 1940s and 1950s we see many references to nurses and the nursing role but - strangely from our twenty-first century perspective - midwives are rarely mentioned as a distinct body of health workers.



2 The assumption was that nurses had the skills to advise mothers on the health of their children, and doctors should be called in case of an emergency. It was in the 1960s that midwives started to receive growing attention from WHO as a group with unique skills and enormous influence on the health of mothers and newborns. In WHO's first few decades, the Organization's work with nurses (and, as time progressed, midwives) was primarily focused on helping countries organize educational programmes for these professions, while at the same time providing advice on the role of both in different health service contexts. A whole series of reforms was - and still is - necessary at all levels of society before nurses and midwives can make their maximum contribution to human health.

# VOCABULARY:

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**Midwifery:** Obstetricia

**Nursing:** Enfermería

**Midwives:** Parteras

**Widespread:** Extendido(a)

**WHO:** Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS)

**Awareness:** Conciencia

**Regardless:** Sin importar