

The Federation of Finnish Midwives

Statement on the International Day of the Midwife 2022

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### **Midwives are always needed**

A need for trained midwives was recognized in Finland over 200 years ago and the education of midwives began in 1816. The main goal was to reduce infant mortality rates and improve maternal health. Not anyone can call themselves a midwife or their work midwifery. According to the Act on Healthcare Professionals, a midwife is a member of a licensed profession, and only a licensed midwife can use the title, work as a midwife or offer midwifery services. A degree in midwifery, which is regulated by strict directives, is four and a half years long and thus the longest of all health care degrees in universities of applied sciences. As specialists of sexual and reproductive health, midwives are professionals of family-centered care regarding pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and gynecological healthcare as well as in the comprehensive care of gynecological patients.

Midwives have played an integral part in establishing the Finnish maternity healthcare system, which was founded 100 years ago. Until the Primary Health Care Act in 1972, midwives worked in maternity healthcare from pregnancy until the newborn was two weeks old. The Act narrowed midwives' possibilities to work in maternity care, since it is nowadays mostly united with children's healthcare. Unlike other Nordic countries or according to the World Health Organization's recommendations, the midwives' knowledge in Finland is not being fully utilized today.

Recently, appreciation of the value of healthcare professionals, including midwives, has been given in public discussions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Midwives successfully took care of their clients during the pandemic just like they have always done. They have also expressed their concern on the reduced support given to families during pregnancy and childbirth because of lowered midwifery resources.

This year Finnish midwives have watched how their Ukrainian midwife colleagues have helped mothers give birth during bombings and how families survive in the middle of a warzone. Some refugees have already arrived in Finland, and thousands more are still expected to come in search of shelter and protection. We midwives meet them in our work and treat them professionally, like any other client, considering their unique needs and circumstances. Some midwives have also taken part in humanitarian work in Finland and around the world.

Whatever the world political situation, midwives are always needed. Pregnancy, childbirth and sickness never ask for good timing. Midwives want to perform their work well and in an ethically sustainable way. We are always on the side of mothers, children and families. Improving salaries and working conditions will ensure that midwives and quality midwifery will also be available in the future.

The theme of the International Day of the Midwife, organized by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), is "100 years of progress". The ICM emphasizes that investing in midwives and midwifery is shown to save human lives and improve the welfare of women, children and families cost effectively. A world without midwives would be harmful to health and cause suffering to women, mothers, children and families. It would also cause harm to public health and economies, the outcomes of which would only be seen years from now. The ICM challenges us to think about what the world would be like if midwives and midwifery care gained the respect and value they ought to

have, also financially? Put simply: In such a scenario, everyone would have the sexual- and reproductive health services they deserve, and we could obtain equality and sexual rights.

The Federation of Finnish Midwives asks: Can the Finnish welfare system afford not to invest in midwives' working conditions and guarantee them a decent salary? Are we truly willing to invest in women, children and families in Finland?

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