

# Global Competencies for Midwife Leaders

**2026**

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## **Gender inclusivity statement**

At ICM we centre the experiences of women and girls in our work, while also recognising that gender diverse people, including trans and non-binary people, also need access to a midwife for sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health care.

# Introduction

The Global Competencies for Midwife Leaders recognise midwives as autonomous, highly skilled health professionals whose leadership is essential to advancing sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health (SRMNAH). Through their expert knowledge, independent practice (1), clinical expertise, and advocacy, midwives shape and strengthen health policy, health systems, improve the quality of care, and directly influence the outcomes and lived experiences of women, newborns, adolescents, and families.

Midwife leadership is present across multiple settings and encompasses six key domains (2):

- |                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1 Political-strategic | 4 Educational |
| 2 Operational         | 5 Research    |
| 3 Regulatory          | 6 Clinical    |

**“All midwives are leaders.”**

Leadership is not confined to positional authority or managerial designation; it is intrinsic to midwifery practice. Every midwife shapes clinical decisions, advocates for women and families, influences care environments, and contribute to the performance, integrity and resilience of health systems. The journey to become a midwife leader begins during pre-service education, is further developed at entry into the profession and is intentionally cultivated through education aligned with ICM Global Standards.

The [ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice](#) provide the foundation for safe, autonomous, independent, evidence-based care across SRMNAH services (3). The Essential Competencies extend beyond clinical proficiency to encompass professional behaviours that are inherently leadership oriented: ethical practice, accountability, communication, shared decision-making, cultural humility, quality improvement, and advocacy (3,4). In this way, leadership is embedded within everyday midwifery practice.

Within the Global Competencies for Midwife Leaders (here after referred to as the Leadership Competencies), leadership encompasses relational capability, quality improvement, advocacy, cultural safety, and strategic influence within health systems.

It recognises that leadership is developmental and progressive across a midwife's career. From the point of initial qualification, midwives exercise clinical judgement, professional autonomy, and collaborative practice. As experience and expertise deepen, leadership expands to include mentorship, service development and improvement, research, and research translation, workforce strengthening, and policy engagement.

The Leadership Competencies outline a structured set of competencies that include entry-level midwifery roles up to senior management. It articulates graduated levels of proficiency that reflect increasing responsibility, autonomy, influence, and health system impact. These levels enable midwives to understand leadership expectations associated with their role and stage of professional development, while providing clear pathways for growth across their career trajectory.

Leadership in midwifery is therefore not episodic, but cumulative. It is expressed through:

- Clinical judgement, autonomous and independent practice
- Respectful, ethical rights and evidence-based midwifery care
- Interdisciplinary collaboration, team, and stakeholder influence
- Community engagement and health promotion
- Quality improvement and safety leadership
- Policy contribution and system strengthening

As midwives progress in their careers, these capabilities evolve from direct clinical leadership at the point of care, to broader organisational and strategic influence. At its most advanced levels, midwifery leadership contributes to shaping regulatory environments, informing national health strategies, and more.

By defining leadership across progressive levels, the Leadership Competencies affirm ICM's position that all midwives are leaders, while recognising that leadership matures in scope, complexity, and impact over time. It provides a coherent structure to guide educators, regulators, employers, and professional associations in developing, supporting, and sustaining midwifery leadership at all levels.

For clarity and consistency, certain terms used throughout this document have specific meanings. These terms are defined in the Glossary, at the end of the document.

The Glossary provides concise explanations to support shared understanding and accurate interpretation of key concepts discussed within this document. Refer to it when interpreting the content.

# A Collaborative Approach to Developing the Leadership Competencies

The development of the Global Competencies for Midwife Leaders was guided by a dedicated working group established through an open expression of interest. A total of 43 applications were received, of which 35 met the expression of interest criteria and formed a diverse and representative working group. Members included midwives and stakeholders from countries across all ICM's global regions: Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, the Americas, and Western Pacific (for a full list, see Appendix 1).

The working group encompassed a broad range of professional backgrounds, practice settings, and leadership experiences, including clinical practice, education, policy, organisational management, and research. This breadth of expertise ensured that discussions reflected multiple perspectives, contextual nuances, and diverse cultural considerations, thereby enhancing the global relevance and applicability of the competencies to midwifery practice across different health systems and resource contexts.

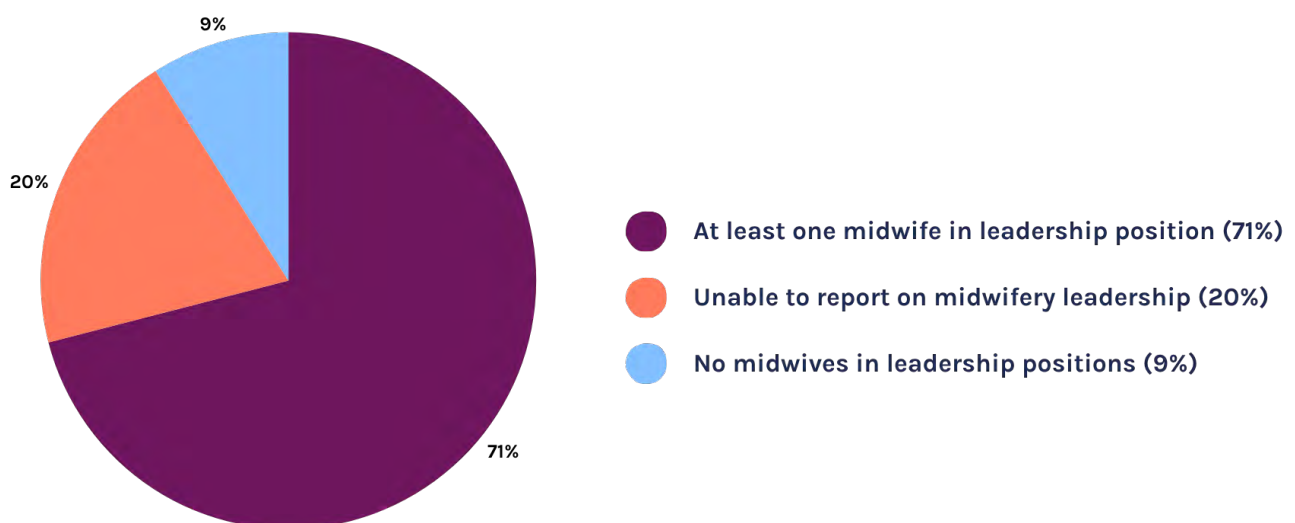
The group formally commenced work in July 2025 and convened five structured meetings over a six-month period, with additional work conducted between meetings to critically review the literature, evaluate emerging themes from the scoping review and iteratively refine the draft leadership competencies. Each meeting followed a structured agenda, including review of thematic findings, discussion of draft competencies, cross-regional comparison of contextual applicability, and identification of gaps or redundancies. Decisions were made through consensus with rationale documented, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor throughout the process.

The comprehensive and iterative approach, combining literature review, thematic analysis, and expert deliberation, ensured that the final Leadership Competencies are evidence-informed, globally relevant, and adaptable across diverse midwifery roles, levels of leadership, and practice settings. The methodology is further described in Appendix 3.

# Why Midwifery Needs Leadership Competencies

There are persistent and systemic gaps in leadership development within the midwifery profession. While data reported by 80 countries indicate that 71% countries have at least one midwife in a leadership position, usually in ministries of health, regulatory bodies, or health facilities. However, midwifery representation in leadership remains uneven, often isolated, and insufficient to influence system-wide decision-making. A further 20% of countries were unable to report on midwifery leadership at all, and 9% reported no midwives in leadership positions at any level, underscoring significant weaknesses in leadership visibility, data, and pathways (4) (Figure 1).

**Midwifery Leadership Representation Across 80 Countries (State of the World's Midwifery 2021)**



*Figure 1*

Limited opportunities for leadership development, coupled with the scarcity of women leaders as role models, continue to constrain midwives' progression into influential roles. Despite strong evidence that midwives save lives, reduce preventable maternal and newborn deaths, and improve quality and equity of care, many midwives lack access to structured, evidence-informed leadership training and continuing professional development. The absence of globally aligned Leadership Competencies has contributed to fragmented and inconsistent approaches to leadership preparation, limiting midwives' ability to shape policy and health system reform.

The Global Competencies for Midwife Leaders directly responds to this gap by providing a contemporary, evidence-informed foundation for leadership development that can be adapted to diverse national and local contexts, strengthening the midwifery profession and accelerating progress toward national and global SRMNAH goals.

The absence of globally aligned competencies for midwife leaders has contributed to fragmented and inconsistent approaches to leadership preparation, limiting midwives' ability to shape policy and health system reform

Corbin et al. (5) highlight five major leadership domains that have emerged across international health professions:

- Leading self
- Leading team
- Leading client care
- Leading organisations
- Leading systems

These domains can be adapted to reflect the unique scope and contextual needs of midwifery. This evidence underscores the value of a comprehensive list of Leadership Competencies that spans individual, team, organisational, and system levels, supporting alignment of midwifery leadership expectations with broader health leadership paradigms (5).

# The Power of Leadership Competencies

The Leadership Competencies have the potential to support the safe, effective, and high-quality provision of midwifery services. The framework used to develop the Leadership Competencies is described below, with the methodology further explained at Appendices 2 and 3.

Competency	Description
<b>Self-leadership and personal development</b>	Midwife leaders demonstrate insight into their values, emotions, strengths, limitations, and tensions, using emotional intelligence to lead themselves and others. They show accountability, resilience, and reflective practice, committing to continuous learning that drives personal growth and organisational effectiveness (6,7,8).
<b>People leadership and personal development</b>	Midwife leaders inspire, support, and enable individuals and teams to achieve shared goals while cultivating a positive, accountable, and high-performance culture that strengthens workforce capability and care outcomes (9, 10, 11,12)
<b>Relational and communicative leadership</b>	Midwife leaders cultivate trust and collaboration through empathetic, strengths-based communication. They communicate with clarity and purpose, listen actively, and adapt their approach to influence understanding, strengthen trust, and optimise outcomes across individuals, teams, and stakeholders (8,13,14,15).
<b>Clinical and ethical leadership</b>	Midwife leaders apply professional, clinical, and ethical standards to leadership and decision-making, role-modelling integrity and accountability while advocating for safe, woman-centred, evidence-based care (14,15,16).
<b>Systems and strategic thinking</b>	Midwife leaders apply critical thinking and evidence appraisal in complex clinical and organisational contexts, anticipating and influencing health systems through strategic, evidence-informed decisions that align resources and achieve sustainable workforce, service, and care outcomes (15,17,18,19,20).
<b>Advocacy, policy, and social responsibility</b>	Midwife leaders engage stakeholders and build strategic partnerships to strengthen SRMNAH, integrate services, and maximise collective impact. They advocate for women's, newborns', and midwives' rights, influencing policy to advance equitable, ethical care aligned with ICM Essential Competencies (3,4).

Competency	Description
<b>Education, mentorship, and capacity building</b>	Midwife leaders educate, mentor, coach, sponsor and develop individuals and teams through structured education, preceptorship, and workforce planning, supporting sustainable professional growth, knowledge transfer, and high standards of midwifery care (2,8,26).
<b>Quality improvement, innovation and data literacy</b>	Midwife leaders apply analytical, creative, and leadership expertise, using robust data collection, analysis, and quality improvement methodologies to design, implement, monitor, and sustain improvements that advance innovation, high-quality care, and a culture of continuous learning (14,21,22).
<b>Equity, inclusion, and cultural safety.</b>	Midwife leaders foster inclusive, culturally safe environments that promote equity, respect diversity, reduce systemic inequities, and prioritise equitable and non-discriminatory practice and community partnerships in service design and decision-making (14,20,23).
<b>Crisis and operational leadership</b>	Midwife leaders ensure safe, effective midwifery practice during crises by balancing timely decision-making, continuity of care, trauma-informed responses, staff and patient safety, and professional standards, underpinned by education aligned to the demands of the crisis (14,20,29).
<b>Collaboration and conflict resolution</b>	Midwife leaders foster cooperation through collaboration with interdisciplinary teams, organisations, and stakeholders, building respectful, productive relationships. They address disagreements constructively and work toward shared goals, sustaining positive environments and strengthening team and organisational effectiveness (14,30).
<b>Environment and climate sustainability</b>	Midwife leaders integrate environmental awareness, sustainable practices, and climate-responsive leadership into midwifery care, education, and service delivery; promotes environmentally responsible decision-making, reduces healthcare impact, and advocates for climate-resilient, equitable maternal and newborn services (31,32)

The Leadership Competencies can also support health systems and leaders in a variety of ways:

- Contribute to the reduction of unwarranted variation in midwifery leadership practice and capability, while providing countries with a clear and structured framework that can be adapted to national and local contexts
- Offer countries, professional associations, education and regulatory bodies, and employing organisations, a common reference point for the development, review, and assurance of midwifery leadership roles
- Support the creation of clear and standardised job descriptions that are aligned with regulatory requirements and the midwives' scope of practice
- Support the systematic review of existing midwifery leadership roles by enabling organisations to assess leadership capacity and capability, identify gaps, and address these through the development or revision of current and future roles
- Inform leadership curriculum and competency development by mapping health leadership competencies identified globally to midwifery practice
- At the individual level, the framework supports midwifery leaders in self-assessment and guiding professional development
- At the organisational level, it informs performance management, leadership development, and succession planning
- At the system level, it supports strategic workforce planning and policy alignment

# The Relevance of Leadership Styles

To make effective use of the Leadership Competency Framework, it is essential to reflect on the diverse types and styles of leadership.

Leadership is not limited to formal authority or designated roles; rather, it encompasses formal or positional leadership, clinical leadership, strategic and systems leadership, and informal or distributed leadership exercised through influence and expertise. In addition, leadership is expressed through a range of styles, including transformational, relational, situational, democratic, transactional, and, in certain hierarchical contexts, autocratic leadership (8,9)

Recognising this diversity enables Leadership Competencies to be applied with flexibility across a range of roles and practice settings. It supports midwives to critically identify, articulate, and optimise their leadership contributions in ways that are responsive to, and congruent with, their respective cultural, organisational, and professional contexts.

Relational and distributed leadership approaches align closely with the collaborative and values-based foundations of the [Philosophy and Model of Midwifery Care](#), while situational leadership recognises the need to adapt leadership behaviours to varying contexts and levels of authority (8,9).

Although autocratic leadership is generally less congruent with the Midwifery Philosophy, understanding its presence within hierarchical health systems is important to enable midwives to navigate power structures and exercise influence effectively. Diversity of leadership types and styles is essential for effective application of this leadership competency framework, as midwives lead across multiple levels of the health system, often without formal authority.

Research has highlighted that effective midwife leaders demonstrate a strong professional identity, relational competence, political awareness, resilience, and a commitment to advocacy and quality improvement (8). These characteristics reinforce the need for flexible, inclusive Leadership Competencies that acknowledge multiple leadership approaches (8,10), validate existing leadership practice, and support midwives to develop contextually relevant competencies that strengthen workforce leadership, service quality, and health system transformation.

# Global Competencies for Midwifery Leadership Framework

The Leadership Competencies are described in detail in the next section. They are numbered one to twelve for clarity and reference only; the sequence does not indicate priority, hierarchy, or relative importance. All the Leadership Competencies are equally essential and interconnected, with their significance shaped by context, role, and stage of leadership development.

## Proficiency Levels within the Leadership Competencies

Clear levels of proficiency are essential within the Leadership Competencies to ensure that leadership development is purposeful, transparent, and measurable. Leadership capability does not emerge uniformly; rather, it evolves through experience, reflection, and increasing exposure to complexity. Without defined levels, expectations may remain ambiguous, assessment inconsistent, and development opportunities misaligned with individual capability. Establishing structured proficiency levels provides a coherent pathway for growth, enabling individuals and organisations to recognise progression, support capability building, and align leadership expectations across varying roles and contexts.

Leadership proficiency levels within the Leadership Competencies are grounded in established evidence demonstrating that professional capability develops progressively over time, advancing from foundational application to sustained, strategic impact. The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (11) and Patricia Benner's (13) adaptation of this model to professional practice recognise that effectiveness varies according to experience, consistency of performance, level of independence, and the complexity of situations managed.

Informed by these foundational models, the competency framework adopts four defined levels of proficiency: Foundational, Proficient, Advanced, and Strategic (see Figure 2).

They provide shared expectations across roles and contexts, support equitable and transparent assessment, guide targeted professional development, and enable systematic succession planning. Importantly, they ensure that leadership is evaluated not solely by observable behaviours, but by the breadth of influence, scope of responsibility, and measurable impact demonstrated in practice.

Four levels of proficiency are used to inform the Leadership Competencies (11, 13), are described below.



**Foundational** proficiency reflects early-career/emerging leaders or entry-level leadership capability, where midwives lead clinically, demonstrate basic application of Leadership Competencies in familiar situations, apply guidance and feedback, and focus on building confidence, consistency, and capability within defined responsibilities.

**Proficient** proficiency represents consolidated leadership capability, where midwives apply Leadership Competencies independently across varied contexts, like for example ward or facility health areas, adapt to complexity, and contribute beyond immediate responsibilities through mentoring others and supporting continuous improvement.

**Advanced** proficiency characterises senior leadership roles requiring depth and breadth of capability in complex, ambiguous, or high-impact situations. At this level, midwives influence others through expertise and example, integrate leadership competencies across teams, functions, or health facilities and drive sustainable improvement.

**Strategic** proficiency reflects executive or system-level leadership, where midwives shape the direction, standards, and long-term application of leadership competencies. This level involves leading transformation, influencing across organisational and sector boundaries, and embedding leadership capability within systems, culture, and future workforce development (10,11).

*Figure 2*

# Competency 1: Self-Leadership, Personal, and Professional Identity

Midwife leaders demonstrate insight into their values, strengths, limitations, and tensions, using emotional intelligence to lead themselves and others. They show accountability, resilience, and reflective practice, committing to continuous learning that drives personal growth and organisational effectiveness.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates consistent, effective self-management and accountability, recognising personal strengths and development needs and taking deliberate action to manage performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates reliability, punctuality, and accountability for own work</li> <li>• Recognises personal strengths and areas for improvement</li> <li>• Seeks and responds constructively to feedback</li> <li>• Manages workload, time, and competing priorities effectively</li> <li>• Maintains professionalism and composure under routine pressure</li> <li>• Shows willingness to learn, care for, and develop self</li> <li>• Engages in ongoing learning and development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently meets personal commitments</li> <li>• Feedback reflects openness and responsiveness</li> <li>• Minimal errors or lapses in judgment in routine work</li> <li>• Clear personal development plans initiated</li> <li>• Demonstrates safe, sound judgement in routine situations</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively manages self in complex situations and actively develops personal capability</li> <li>• Applies learning to improve performance and contributes to team or organisational goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates self-awareness to adapt behaviour in different contexts</li> <li>• Sets clear goals for professional development and actively monitors progress</li> <li>• Demonstrates resilience and composure under pressure or change</li> <li>• Actively seeks, reflects on and integrates feedback for continuous improvement</li> <li>• Manages personal, stress, and wellbeing</li> <li>• Models learning and development for peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieves objectives in complex or ambiguous contexts</li> <li>• Demonstrates personal growth and improved performance over time</li> <li>• Received positive feedback from peers and managers regarding self-management</li> <li>• Actively participates in development activities and applies learning</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads by example in self-leadership and development</li> <li>Anticipates personal development needs, influences others to grow, and sustains high performance under pressure or uncertainty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively identifies and addresses skill gaps and development opportunities</li> <li>Maintains focus and performance in high-pressure or complex situations</li> <li>Demonstrates advanced emotional intelligence and self-regulation</li> <li>Coaches or mentors' others in self-leadership and resilience</li> <li>Aligns personal goals with team and organisational strategy</li> <li>Models accountability, integrity, and learning as core values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustains high performance in complex, high-stakes situations</li> <li>Recognised as a role model for personal accountability and development</li> <li>Demonstrates successful mentoring or coaching of peers in self-leadership</li> <li>Clear evidence of continuous learning applied to practice</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes personal and organisational capability through exemplary self-leadership</li> <li>Influences organisational culture, models lifelong learning, and fosters resilience and development at scale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets and communicates personal vision aligned with organisational strategy</li> <li>Advocates for and embeds a culture of personal accountability and development</li> <li>Leads by example in resilience, adaptability, and continuous improvement</li> <li>Inspires and develops leaders across the organisation in self-leadership</li> <li>Integrates self-leadership with organisational transformation initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation-wide culture reflects accountability, learning, and resilience</li> <li>Sustained high performance and growth at organisational or system level</li> <li>Leaders and teams demonstrate improved capability modelled on personal example</li> <li>Positive feedback from senior stakeholders on influence and impact</li> </ul>

## Competency 2: People Leadership

Midwife leaders inspire, support, and enable individuals and teams to achieve shared goals while cultivating a positive, accountable, and high-performance culture that strengthens workforce capability and care outcomes.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads individuals or small teams by providing clear direction, managing day to day performance and building trust through consistent communication and support</li> <li>Focuses on developing personal leadership capability while ensuring team objectives are met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides clear expectations, priorities, and direction to individuals or small teams</li> <li>Manages day-to-day performance, addressing issues promptly and constructively</li> <li>Communicates regularly and consistently with team members</li> <li>Builds trust through reliability, fairness, and follow-through</li> <li>Supports team wellbeing and creates a respectful, inclusive environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team members demonstrate understanding of their roles and responsibilities</li> <li>Performance or conduct issues are addressed early reducing the likelihood of escalation</li> <li>Feedback is acted upon</li> <li>Stable performance and engagement within the team</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads established teams effectively by motivating performance, developing capability, and encouraging collaboration</li> <li>Demonstrates strong coaching capability, manages complexity, and balances people development with delivery of results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivates individuals and teams to deliver strong, consistent performance</li> <li>Coaches and develops others through regular feedback and development conversations</li> <li>Encourages collaboration and constructive challenge within and across teams</li> <li>Manages competing priorities and complexity effectively</li> <li>Balances performance delivery with people development</li> <li>Addresses conflict and performance concerns confidently, fairly and constructively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team capability and confidence demonstrate measurable improvement over time</li> <li>Strong collaboration and reduced dependency on the leader</li> <li>Consistent delivery of results</li> <li>Positive engagement and retention outcomes</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads leaders and multiple teams by shaping culture, building high-performing environments, and strengthening leadership capability beyond their immediate team</li> <li>Anticipates challenges, leads through change, and drives sustained performance through others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads and develops leaders, not just individual contributors</li> <li>Shapes culture and ways of working across multiple teams</li> <li>Builds high-performing, resilient teams that operate effectively without direct oversight</li> <li>Anticipates people-related risks and capability gaps</li> <li>Leads teams through change, ambiguity, and pressure</li> <li>Drives sustained performance through empowerment and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successors ready for leadership roles</li> <li>Consistent performance across teams</li> <li>Strong leadership bench strength</li> <li>Teams adapt well to change and uncertainty</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads at the organisational level by setting direction for people leadership, building leadership pipelines, and embedding a strong, values-led culture</li> <li>Influences across boundaries, drives transformation, and ensures long-term organisational capability and succession</li> <li>Monitors future leaders and build sustainable leadership capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets organisational direction and expectations for effective people leadership</li> <li>Builds and sustains leadership pipelines and succession plans</li> <li>Embeds values, inclusion, and leadership expectations into systems and culture</li> <li>Influences across functions, organisations, and external stakeholders</li> <li>Leads large-scale cultural or organisational transformation</li> <li>Ensures long-term organisational capability, resilience, and sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership capability is visible and consistent across the organisation</li> <li>Strong succession coverage for critical roles</li> <li>Organisational culture and values are actively demonstrated in everyday practice</li> <li>Organisation sustains performance through change and over time</li> </ul>

## Competency 3: Relational and Communicative Leadership

Midwife leaders cultivate trust and collaboration through empathetic, strengths-based communication (26). They communicate with clarity and purpose, listen actively, and adapt their approach to influence understanding, strengthen trust, and optimise outcomes across individuals, teams, and stakeholders.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates clearly and respectfully with individuals and teams, builds working relationships, and listens to understand</li> <li>Adapts communication style with guidance and focuses on accuracy and clarity</li> <li>Reflects on feedback to improve personal communication and relational skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates information clearly and appropriately for the audience</li> <li>Listens actively and seeks clarification</li> <li>Builds positive, respectful working relationships</li> <li>Communicates openly and transparently, including during clinical and operational challenges</li> <li>Responds constructively to feedback</li> <li>Demonstrates emotional awareness in interactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Messages are understood with minimal follow-up</li> <li>Colleagues feel heard and respected</li> <li>Misunderstandings are resolved quickly</li> <li>Feedback is acknowledged and acted upon</li> <li>Relationships are professional and stable</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses communication and relationships intentionally to influence outcomes, build collaboration, and manage complexity</li> <li>Adjusts style confidently and handles difficult conversations effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapts communication style to different individuals, cultures, and contexts</li> <li>Builds trust-based relationships across teams</li> <li>Communicates purpose, expectations, and feedback clearly</li> <li>Handles conflict, disagreement, and sensitive conversations constructively</li> <li>Encourages open dialogue and constructive challenge</li> <li>Balances advocacy with inquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong cross-team collaboration</li> <li>Difficult conversations lead to clarity, not escalation</li> <li>Stakeholders report trust and confidence</li> <li>Reduced misalignment or rework</li> <li>Teams engage openly and raise issues early</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds influence through relationships and communication across multiple teams or functions</li> <li>• Shapes inclusive dialogue, mentorship, alignment, and culture, and shared leadership practice particularly in complex or ambiguous situations</li> <li>• Uses strategic communication to influence decision making and organisational alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds credibility and influence beyond direct authority</li> <li>• Aligns diverse stakeholders around shared outcomes</li> <li>• Navigates political, cultural, and organisational dynamics effectively</li> <li>• Communicates through ambiguity and change</li> <li>• Models emotionally intelligent leadership under pressure</li> <li>• Creates environments where honest dialogue is the norm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders align despite differing priorities</li> <li>• Teams communicate openly during change</li> <li>• Reduced silos and improved organisational cohesion</li> <li>• Leaders seek input or mediation</li> <li>• Sustained trust during high-pressure situations</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shapes organisational communication culture and build long term relational norms</li> <li>• Influences broadly and externally, enabling trust, engagement, and alignment at scale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets standards for leadership communication and relational behaviour</li> <li>• Shapes organisational narratives and messaging during transformation</li> <li>• Influences across organisational and external boundaries</li> <li>• Builds long-term trust with key stakeholders and partners</li> <li>• Embeds inclusive, transparent communication practices</li> <li>• Anticipates reputational, cultural, and relational risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent communication quality across the organisation</li> <li>• High levels of trust in leadership</li> <li>• Strong stakeholder relationships internally and externally</li> <li>• Successful navigation of complex change or crisis</li> <li>• Organisational culture supports openness and psychological safety</li> </ul>

## Competency 4: Clinical and Ethical Leadership

Midwife leaders apply professional, clinical, and ethical standards to leadership and decision-making, role-modelling integrity and accountability while advocating for safe, respectful, woman-centred, evidence-based care.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies evidence-based knowledge and ethical principles to practice and immediate decisions</li> <li>• Recognises ethical dilemmas, responds in accordance with professional standards, and seeks guidance when required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates sound clinical or professional judgment in day-to-day work</li> <li>• Understands, and practices in accordance with relevant code of ethics</li> <li>• Identifies ethical or safety concerns and escalates appropriately</li> <li>• Acts with honesty, integrity, and accountability</li> <li>• Reflects on own practice and limitations</li> <li>• Prioritises safety, dignity, and wellbeing in all decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with clinical standards and protocols</li> <li>• Accurate documentation and decision rationale</li> <li>• Appropriate escalation of concerns</li> <li>• Positive audit or supervision feedback</li> <li>• No avoidable safety or ethical breaches</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies clinical and ethical judgment consistently across more complex situations</li> <li>• Balances competing priorities, supports others in ethical decision-making, and maintains standards under pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies ethical principles in complex or ambiguous cases</li> <li>• Balances safety, quality, resource constraints, and individual needs</li> <li>• Provides guidance to others on ethical or clinical decisions</li> <li>• Challenges unsafe or unethical practice appropriately</li> <li>• Maintains professional standards during pressure or conflict</li> <li>• Uses reflective practice to improve decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound decision-making in complex cases</li> <li>• Peer recognition as a trusted clinical or ethical advisor</li> <li>• Effective handling of ethical dilemmas or incidents</li> <li>• Improved quality or safety outcomes</li> <li>• Learning implemented from incidents or reviews</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads ethical and clinical standards across teams or services</li> <li>Shapes practice, addresses systemic risks, and ensures ethical decision-making is embedded in everyday work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads or contributes to clinical governance and ethical oversight</li> <li>Identifies and mitigates systemic clinical or ethical risks</li> <li>Supports teams through high-risk or morally complex situations</li> <li>Promotes a culture of safety, respect, openness, and accountability</li> <li>Integrates ethical considerations into service or operational decisions</li> <li>Coaches leaders in ethical and clinical deliberation and decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved safety, quality, or compliance across teams</li> <li>Reduced repeat incidents or ethical breaches</li> <li>Strong audit, inspection, or accreditation outcomes</li> <li>Staff confidence in raising concerns</li> <li>Consistent ethical decision-making across services</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational or system-level clinical and ethical standards</li> <li>Leads complex ethical decision-making, influences health policy, clinical standards, ethical frameworks, and ensures long-term professional integrity and public trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets and influences clinical and ethical policy and standards</li> <li>Leads organisational responses to major ethical or clinical challenges</li> <li>Balances public interest, risk, quality, and sustainability</li> <li>Influences external bodies, regulators, or professional groups</li> <li>Ensures ethical leadership is embedded in governance and culture</li> <li>Anticipates future ethical, clinical, or regulatory risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong organisational reputation for integrity and quality</li> <li>Successful navigation of major incidents or ethical crises</li> <li>Enduring governance structures and ethical frameworks</li> <li>High regulatory confidence and compliance</li> <li>Sustained public, patient, or stakeholder trust</li> </ul>

## Competency 5: Systems and Strategic Thinking

Midwife leaders apply critical thinking and evidence appraisal in complex clinical and organisational contexts, anticipating and influencing health systems through strategic, evidence-informed decisions that align resources and achieve sustainable workforce, service, and care outcomes.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands how their role and team contribute to broader systems and goals, applying structured thinking and evidence to make sound decisions in routine, well-defined situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands organisational goals, priorities, interdependencies, and the “why” behind decisions.</li> <li>Uses data, evidence, logic, and standard frameworks to analyse situations and make informed decisions</li> <li>Recognises cause-and-effect relationships, assumptions, limitations, risks, constraints, and unintended consequences</li> <li>Identifies problems, gaps in care provision, and applies strategic guidance appropriately in daily decisions</li> <li>Seeks guidance or clarification when facing unfamiliar or complex situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes decisions aligned with strategy, objectives, and established guidelines</li> <li>Provides clear rationale and reasoning for actions</li> <li>Identifies, assesses, and escalates risks appropriately</li> <li>Addresses problems timely, minimizing negative downstream impacts and correcting errors</li> <li>Uses available information effectively, with feedback confirming sound judgment</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applies systems thinking across teams, analysing complex information, anticipating impacts, balancing trade-offs, and translating strategy into actionable plans while making informed decisions in ambiguous situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyses patterns, trends, interdependencies, and potential risks across areas</li> <li>Balances short-term delivery with long-term implications and adapts plans to changing conditions</li> <li>Translates strategy into clear priorities, plans, and outcomes, integrating financial, operational, people, and risk considerations</li> <li>Critically evaluates information, challenges assumptions, and considers diverse perspectives and impacts</li> <li>Communicates reasoning and rationale effectively to support decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinates delivery across teams with clear prioritisation and resource alignment</li> <li>Makes decisions based on thorough analysis and reasoning, demonstrating ongoing improvement in problem-solving</li> <li>Ensures outcomes align with strategic objectives while minimising unintended consequences and rework</li> <li>Tracks measurable progress against objectives and adapts plans as needed</li> <li>Builds confidence through positive feedback from peers and cross-functional stakeholders</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads strategic and critical thinking across multiple teams or functions, shaping system performance, aligning services, anticipating risks, and applying advanced analysis in complex, ambiguous, high-stakes environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipates future trends, risks, opportunities, and potential consequences</li> <li>Designs, influences, and improves systems, structures, and processes across boundaries</li> <li>Aligns diverse stakeholders and integrates multiple perspectives, evidence, and external factors in decision-making</li> <li>Makes high-impact decisions under uncertainty using structured frameworks for planning and risk assessment</li> <li>Drives sustainable change, challenges prevailing thinking, and provides guidance on critical thinking to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivers complex, cross-organisational initiatives that improve system performance and outcomes</li> <li>Aligns stakeholders and teams despite competing priorities, building trust in analysis and judgment</li> <li>Reduces systemic risks, inefficiencies, and negative downstream impacts</li> <li>Makes consistently sound, high-impact decisions in complex situations</li> <li>Develops teams' analytical capabilities while being recognised as a strategic leader</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes long-term system direction, influencing policy, culture, and resource allocation at scale while cultivating innovation, organisational resilience, sustainability, and strategic decision-making across complex healthcare systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets long-term vision, strategic direction, and organisational priorities using insight and evidence</li> <li>Shapes policy, investment, and governance decisions, influencing external systems and partners</li> <li>Anticipates and mitigates system-wide risks, balancing performance, ethics, and sustainability</li> <li>Builds organisational adaptability and resilience while modelling evidence-based decision-making and challenging cognitive biases</li> <li>Develops and supports leaders and teams to apply critical thinking and structured reasoning across the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustains organisational and system success through long-term value creation, risk mitigation, and strategic alignment</li> <li>Communicates a clear strategic narrative understood across the organisation</li> <li>Leads effective responses to major disruption or change, cultivating innovation and quality</li> <li>Builds strong external reputation, partnerships, and stakeholder confidence in decision-making</li> <li>Develops leadership teams that consistently apply critical thinking to improve strategic outcomes</li> </ul>

## Competency 6: Advocacy, Policy, and Social Responsibility

Midwife leaders engage stakeholders and build strategic partnerships to strengthen SRMNAH, integrate services, and maximise collective impact. They advocate for women’s, newborns’, and midwives’ rights, influencing policy to advance equitable, ethical care aligned with ICM Essential Competencies.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates ethical, socially responsible behaviour</li> <li>• Participates cooperatively in team efforts, builds working relationships beyond immediate team, and contributes constructively to collaborative goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands policies, regulations, and societal expectations; acts ethically and responsibly</li> <li>• Supports advocacy, social responsibility, and team initiatives</li> <li>• Raises concerns appropriately when standards are not met</li> <li>• Builds respectful, collaborative relationships and listens to others’ perspectives</li> <li>• Demonstrates openness, trust, accountability, and cooperation across teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work complies with policies, standards, and ethical guidelines</li> <li>• Participates constructively in advocacy, policy, and team initiatives</li> <li>• Builds positive interpersonal relationships within and beyond the team</li> <li>• Achieves team objectives collaboratively with minimal conflict</li> <li>• Demonstrates awareness of social responsibility and ethical obligations</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates the ability to engage diverse stakeholders and cultivate strategic partnerships that strengthen SRMNAH</li> <li>• Effectively advocates for the rights of women, newborns and midwives, contributing to policy dialogue and collaborative initiatives that advance equitable, ethical care in alignment with the ICM Essential Competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies understanding of policies, regulations, and social impact to decisions</li> <li>• Advocates for ethical and socially responsible practices</li> <li>• Engages and communicates with stakeholders to achieve shared goals</li> <li>• Builds collaborative relationships across teams, promoting knowledge-sharing</li> <li>• Supports change initiatives and shared ownership of outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads initiatives with measurable social, ethical, or policy impact</li> <li>• Gains stakeholder recognition for trustworthy, socially responsible decision-making</li> <li>• Achieves project success through cross-functional cooperation</li> <li>• Sustains collaborative networks and resolves conflicts constructively</li> <li>• Improves compliance, awareness, and outcomes aligned with policies and standards</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drives advocacy and policy initiatives across teams</li> <li>• Anticipates trends, influences strategy ethically, builds multi-stakeholder coalitions, resolves challenges, and fosters system-level collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops and leads cross-team advocacy or social responsibility initiatives</li> <li>• Anticipates societal, regulatory, or ethical risks and opportunities</li> <li>• Builds partnerships, coalitions, and alliances to advance objectives</li> <li>• Influences strategy, mentors, and coaches others in ethical leadership</li> <li>• Mobilises resources, manages conflicts, and promotes inclusive collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements cross-team advocacy or policy initiatives successfully</li> <li>• Shapes organisational practices reflecting ethical and socially responsible leadership</li> <li>• Influences and aligns diverse stakeholders and multi-stakeholder initiatives</li> <li>• Reduces ethical or social risk and ensures successful collaborative delivery</li> <li>• Builds long-term partnerships and trusted networks across the organisation</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shapes organisational or system-wide advocacy, policy, and social responsibility strategy Influences stakeholders, embeds ethical governance, drives sustainable impact, and builds transformative, long-term collaborations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shapes organisational strategy for advocacy, policy, and social responsibility</li> <li>• Influences policy and stakeholders at organisational, sector, or national levels</li> <li>• Builds sustainable, multi-level partnerships and coalitions</li> <li>• Embeds ethics, governance, and collaborative culture into decision-making</li> <li>• Develops future leaders and anticipates long-term societal and system-level impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drives organisation-wide ethical leadership and societal impact</li> <li>• Delivers strategic initiatives achieving measurable social, ethical, or policy outcomes</li> <li>• Establishes and sustains external partnerships and cross-organisational influence</li> <li>• Secures high stakeholder confidence in responsibility, advocacy, and collaboration</li> <li>• Achieves sustained impact through multi-organisational, cross-boundary initiatives</li> </ul>

## Competency 7: Education, Mentorship and Capacity Building

Midwife leaders educate, mentor, coach, sponsor and develop individuals and teams through structured education, preceptorship, and workforce planning, supporting sustainable professional growth, knowledge transfer, and high standards of midwifery care

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports learning and development within immediate teams</li> <li>• Shares knowledge and guidance under supervision and contributes to the development of peers and students in routine contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides accurate guidance and support to students or peers</li> <li>• Shares knowledge and expertise appropriately within own role</li> <li>• Demonstrates willingness to learn from experienced colleagues</li> <li>• Encourages questions and participation in learning activities</li> <li>• Applies evidence-based practice in teaching or mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive feedback from students, peers, or supervisors</li> <li>• Consistent and active participation in team learning activities</li> <li>• Demonstrated understanding of professional guidelines and standards</li> <li>• Minimal errors in teaching or guidance provided</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads teaching, mentoring, and capacity-building activities within teams or departments</li> <li>• Develops others' skills, knowledge, and confidence in midwifery practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans and delivers educational sessions or mentorship programmes</li> <li>• Provides constructive feedback and coaching tailored to individual needs</li> <li>• Identifies learning needs and supports professional development</li> <li>• Encourages reflective practice and critical thinking among mentees</li> <li>• Monitors progress and evaluates learning outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved competence, confidence, and performance of mentees or team members</li> <li>• Positive evaluation of learning sessions or mentorship programs</li> <li>• Demonstrable application of learning in clinical practice</li> <li>• Recognition as a reliable mentor or educator within the team</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads capacity-building and professional development across multiple teams or services</li> <li>Designs educational initiatives, develops mentorship frameworks, establishes coaching opportunities and strengthens workforce capability in midwifery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops and implements structured mentorship and educational programs</li> <li>Aligns learning initiatives with organisational and service priorities</li> <li>Coaches and develops other educators or mentors</li> <li>Promotes a culture of continuous learning and reflective practice</li> <li>Evaluates impact of capacity-building initiatives and adjusts strategies accordingly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved service performance or patient outcomes linked to development initiatives</li> <li>Sustained engagement in learning and mentorship programs across teams</li> <li>Peer and stakeholder recognition for contribution to workforce development</li> <li>Evidence of succession planning and leadership capability development</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational and sector-wide midwifery education, mentorship, and capacity-building strategy</li> <li>Influences policy, develops leadership pipelines, creates opportunities, and ensures sustainable professional development, workforce growth and retention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influences and leads organisational or regional midwifery education and mentorship strategy</li> <li>Establishes frameworks for workforce development and leadership succession</li> <li>Influences external education or professional bodies to strengthen midwifery practice</li> <li>Promotes evidence-based, innovative learning and capacity-building initiatives</li> <li>Models lifelong learning and mentorship culture at scale</li> <li>Sponsors future leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation or sector demonstrates sustained professional growth and leadership capacity</li> <li>Workforce capability and retention improved through structured development programs</li> <li>Recognition by external bodies, regulatory authorities, or professional networks</li> <li>Encourages reverse-mentoring initiatives to reflect on own practice while inspiring the development of future leaders</li> </ul>

## Competency 8: Quality Improvement, Innovation, and Data Literacy

Midwife leaders apply analytical, creative, and leadership expertise, using robust data collection, analysis, and quality improvement methodologies to design, implement, monitor, and sustain improvements that advance innovation (25), high-quality care, and a culture of continuous learning.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies basic data literacy and quality improvement principles to own practice</li> <li>• Participates in improvement initiatives and supports innovation under guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands basic data collection, interpretation, and reporting</li> <li>• Recognises opportunities for small-scale improvement in routine work</li> <li>• Applies evidence-based guidelines in decision-making</li> <li>• Supports innovation by suggesting ideas or improvements</li> <li>• Follows quality standards and protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate documentation and data reporting</li> <li>• Participation in team-level quality improvement activities</li> <li>• Feedback confirms application of evidence-based practice</li> <li>• Minor improvements implemented under supervision</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads or contributes to quality improvement initiatives within teams or services</li> <li>• Uses data to inform decisions, evaluates outcomes, and supports innovative solutions to improve care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collects, analyses, and interprets data to identify improvement opportunities</li> <li>• Designs and implements local quality improvement initiatives</li> <li>• Evaluates outcomes and adjusts approaches based on evidence</li> <li>• Encourages innovation and problem-solving within teams</li> <li>• Uses data to support decision-making and team discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrable improvements in care quality, safety, or efficiency</li> <li>• Positive feedback from colleagues and stakeholders on use of data</li> <li>• Successful implementation of team-level innovations and contribution toward research studies</li> <li>• Decisions are informed by evidence and measurable outcomes</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads quality improvement, innovation, and data-driven initiatives across multiple teams or services</li> <li>Embeds continuous improvement culture and develops others' capability in using data and innovation to improve care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designs and leads multi-team quality improvement programs</li> <li>Applies advanced data analysis and evidence synthesis to inform strategy</li> <li>Mentors and develops staff in data literacy, innovation, and improvement techniques</li> <li>Drives adoption of innovative practices and technology</li> <li>Monitors and reports impact on outcomes and service performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustained improvement across teams or services</li> <li>Staff demonstrate increased competence in data use and quality improvement</li> <li>Recognised for successful implementation of innovative practices, research and publications</li> <li>Measurable improvement in service delivery and patient outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational or system-level strategy for quality improvement, innovation, and data-driven decision-making</li> <li>Influences policy, governance, and culture to embed sustainable, evidence-informed practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops and leads organisational strategy for quality and innovation</li> <li>Uses data to influence policy, resource allocation, and service design</li> <li>Anticipates trends, risks, and opportunities to improve care at scale</li> <li>Fosters an organisational culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and learning</li> <li>Builds capacity and leadership in quality, data literacy, research and innovation across the workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation-wide improvements in patient care quality, safety, or efficiency</li> <li>Sustainable adoption of innovative practices and technology</li> <li>Policy or governance decisions informed by robust data and evidence</li> <li>Recognition as a leader in quality improvement and innovation in the profession</li> <li>Staff capability and confidence in quality improvement and data use are embedded</li> <li>Research is undertaken that adds to the body of knowledge</li> </ul>

## Competency 9: Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Safety

Midwife leaders foster inclusive, culturally safe environments that promote equity, respect diversity, reduce systemic inequities, and prioritise equitable and non-discriminatory practice and community partnerships in service design and decision-making.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates awareness of equity, inclusion, and cultural safety principles and applies them in daily interactions</li> <li>• Recognises bias, respects diversity, and contributes to a safe and inclusive environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates respect for diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and identities</li> <li>• Recognises own biases and limitations</li> <li>• Applies policies and procedures that support equity and inclusion</li> <li>• Communicates respectfully and inclusively</li> <li>• Seeks guidance when faced with culturally sensitive situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from colleagues and peers indicates respectful, inclusive behaviour</li> <li>• Participation in basic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or cultural safety training</li> <li>• Minimal incidents of exclusion, microaggressions, or cultural insensitivity</li> <li>• Observed application of inclusive practices in routine work</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads and promotes equity, inclusion, and cultural safety within teams or departments</li> <li>• Advocates for fair practices and ensures all voices are considered in decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models inclusive behaviour and fosters equitable participation</li> <li>• Identifies and addresses barriers to inclusion within teams</li> <li>• Encourages diverse perspectives in problem-solving and planning</li> <li>• Supports colleagues in applying cultural safety principles</li> <li>• Intervenes constructively in situations involving bias or inequality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teams demonstrate inclusive and equitable practices</li> <li>• Positive feedback from colleagues and stakeholders on inclusivity</li> <li>• Reduction of inequitable outcomes or incidents within team</li> <li>• Successful resolution of bias or inequality-related issues</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shapes equity, inclusion, and cultural safety across multiple teams, services, or organisational functions</li> <li>• Influences culture, policies, and practices to promote systemic equity and inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads initiatives to embed equity and cultural safety in organisational policies and practices</li> <li>• Identifies systemic inequities and develops strategies to address them</li> <li>• Coaches others in inclusive leadership and cultural competency</li> <li>• Shapes policy collaboratively with underserved groups</li> <li>• Monitors and evaluates impact of equity and inclusion initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation demonstrates measurable improvements in inclusivity and equitable outcomes</li> <li>• Staff report awareness and confidence in applying equity and cultural safety principles</li> <li>• Recognised for leadership in advancing inclusion and reducing systemic bias, and discrimination</li> <li>• Reduction in systemic inequities or culturally unsafe practices</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drives organisational or system-wide equity, inclusion, and cultural safety strategy</li> <li>• Influences policy, governance, and external partnerships to achieve sustainable, systemic impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops and leads organisational strategy for equity, inclusion, and cultural safety</li> <li>• Influences policy and governance to embed systemic equity</li> <li>• Builds cross-organisational or sector-wide partnerships to promote inclusion</li> <li>• Models inclusive leadership at the executive level</li> <li>• Anticipates long-term equity risks and opportunities and drives proactive change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation or system recognised for leadership in equity and inclusion</li> <li>• Sustained improvements in workforce diversity, cultural safety, and equitable outcomes</li> <li>• External stakeholders report confidence in organisation's inclusive practices</li> <li>• Equity and inclusion embedded in governance, strategy, and culture</li> </ul>

## Competency 10: Crisis and Operational Leadership

Midwife leaders ensure safe, effective midwifery practice during crises by balancing timely decision-making, continuity of care, trauma-informed responses, staff and patient safety, and professional standards, underpinned by education aligned to the demands of the crisis.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manages own responsibilities effectively during operational pressure or local incidents</li> <li>Follows established procedures and supports team responses in routine disruptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains composure and professionalism under pressure</li> <li>Follows operational policies, escalation pathways, and emergency procedures</li> <li>Prioritises safety of women, babies, and staff</li> <li>Communicates clearly and promptly during incidents</li> <li>Recognises limits of authority and seeks support appropriately</li> <li>Supports colleagues during operational challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adherence to protocols during incidents or surges</li> <li>Accurate documentation and timely escalation</li> <li>Feedback reflects reliability under pressure</li> <li>No avoidable safety incidents linked to response</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads teams effectively during operational challenges or localised crises</li> <li>Coordinates resources, manages competing priorities, and supports staff wellbeing while maintaining safe care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Models inclusive behaviour and Makes timely, sound decisions during operational pressure</li> <li>Coordinates staffing, resources, and workflows</li> <li>Communicates clearly with teams and stakeholders during disruption</li> <li>Identifies and mitigates operational risks</li> <li>Supports staff wellbeing and psychological safety</li> <li>Reviews incidents to support learning and improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe continuity of care during service pressures</li> <li>Reduced escalation or harm during incidents</li> <li>Positive feedback from staff and stakeholders</li> <li>Evidence of learning applied post-incident</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads complex operational responses across services or sites</li> <li>Anticipates risks, manages prolonged or high-impact crises, and stabilises systems while supporting recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads multi-team or multi-site crisis responses</li> <li>Anticipates escalation and plans contingencies</li> <li>Balances clinical, operational, workforce, and ethical considerations</li> <li>Maintains situational awareness across systems</li> <li>Communicates effectively with senior leaders and external partners</li> <li>Leads structured debriefs and recovery planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective management of sustained or complex crises</li> <li>System stability maintained or restored</li> <li>Reduced repeat incidents or operational failures</li> <li>Strong confidence from staff, leaders, and partners</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational or system-wide crisis readiness, operational resilience, and emergency response capability for midwifery services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops crisis and operational preparedness strategy</li> <li>Embeds resilience, surge capacity, and continuity planning</li> <li>Influences policy, governance, and system-level response</li> <li>Leads organisational learning from major incidents</li> <li>Builds leadership capability in crisis and operational management</li> <li>Anticipates future risks and system vulnerabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High readiness and effective response to major incidents</li> <li>Strong audit, assurance, and emergency preparedness outcomes</li> <li>Sustained service continuity during system-level disruption</li> <li>Organisational confidence in crisis leadership capability</li> <li>Improved long-term operational resilience</li> </ul>

# Competency 11: Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

Midwife leaders foster cooperation and collaborate with interdisciplinary healthcare teams, organisations, and stakeholders, building respectful and productive relationships, addressing disagreements constructively, and working toward shared goals to maintain positive working environments and enhance team and organisational effectiveness.

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works effectively with colleagues in routine situations and manages minor disagreements professionally</li> <li>• Seeks guidance when conflicts arise and contributes constructively to team goals</li> <li>• Communicates openly and listens actively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates respect and professionalism in interactions</li> <li>• Participates actively in team discussions</li> <li>• Responds calmly and professionally to minor disagreements or misunderstandings</li> <li>• Seeks guidance or clarification when conflicts occur</li> <li>• Shares information and supports team objectives</li> <li>• Demonstrates willingness to compromise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork and collaboration occur without escalation</li> <li>• Feedback indicates respectful behaviour</li> <li>• Minor conflicts are resolved or escalated appropriately</li> <li>• Contributions support collective outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates effective collaboration across teams or functions</li> <li>• Resolves disagreements constructively, balances differing perspectives, and ensures collective goals are achieved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages open communication and idea-sharing</li> <li>• Mediates disagreements and identifies mutually acceptable solutions</li> <li>• Balances stakeholder interests to maintain relationships and outcomes</li> <li>• Builds trust across teams or departments</li> <li>• Promotes collaboration and collective problem-solving</li> <li>• Manages conflict without undermining morale or relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicts are resolved in a timely and constructive manner</li> <li>• Teams report high levels of cooperation and trust</li> <li>• Shared goals are achieved despite differing perspectives</li> <li>• Stakeholders view the leader as approachable and fair</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads collaboration and conflict resolution across multiple teams or organisational units</li> <li>Anticipates potential conflicts, builds alliances, and fosters a culture of constructive engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influences and aligns multiple stakeholders or teams</li> <li>Anticipates and mitigates potential points of conflict</li> <li>Models constructive debate and problem-solving under pressure</li> <li>Coaches others in collaboration and conflict resolution skills</li> <li>Builds cross-functional partnerships to achieve strategic objectives</li> <li>Promotes a culture of mutual respect and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successful resolution of complex or high-stakes conflicts</li> <li>Sustained collaboration across teams or functions</li> <li>Positive feedback from multiple stakeholders</li> <li>Teams and leaders demonstrate improved conflict management and teamwork</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational culture and structures to enable collaboration and constructive conflict resolution at scale</li> <li>Influences across the organisation and externally to achieve strategic outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets standards and expectations for collaboration and conflict resolution organisation-wide</li> <li>Resolves systemic conflicts that impact performance or reputation</li> <li>Embeds collaboration and conflict resolution practices into policy and culture</li> <li>Influences external partners or stakeholders to achieve shared objectives</li> <li>Builds leadership capability in others to manage conflicts and foster collaboration</li> <li>Drives long-term alignment, engagement, and trust at organisational or system level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation demonstrates a strong collaborative culture</li> <li>Reduction in escalated conflicts across teams and departments</li> <li>Positive engagement and trust metrics</li> <li>Stakeholders report confidence in leadership's conflict management and collaborative approach</li> <li>Strategic initiatives succeed with broad buy-in and minimal friction</li> </ul>

## Competency 12: Environmental and Climate Sustainability

Midwife leaders integrate environmental awareness, sustainable practices, and climate-responsive leadership into midwifery care, education, and service delivery; promotes environmentally responsible decision-making, reduces healthcare impact, and advocates for climate-resilient, equitable SRMNAH services

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates basic awareness of environmental sustainability and climate considerations in healthcare</li> <li>• Applies sustainable practices in own work</li> <li>• Supports environmentally responsible behaviours under guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands basic concepts of environmental sustainability and climate impact in healthcare</li> <li>• Recognises how routine clinical activities can affect the environment</li> <li>• Recognises how climate change can impact maternal and neonatal health</li> <li>• Follows organisational sustainability policies and guidelines</li> <li>• Minimises waste and uses resources responsibly in daily practice</li> <li>• Shows willingness to learn about sustainable healthcare practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent adherence to waste segregation and resource-saving practices</li> <li>• Participation in basic sustainability or environmental awareness training</li> <li>• Supervisor or peer feedback confirms environmentally responsible behaviour</li> <li>• Participates in quality improvement or research projects that examine the environmental impact of maternity services</li> </ul>
<b>Proficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively contributes to environmentally sustainable practices within teams or services</li> <li>• Identifies opportunities to reduce environmental impact and supports implementation of local sustainability initiatives in midwifery care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies areas where waste, energy use, or resource consumption can be reduced</li> <li>• Participates in or leads small-scale sustainability projects within the service</li> <li>• Promotes environmentally responsible clinical and administrative practices</li> <li>• Incorporates climate and environmental considerations into care planning where appropriate</li> <li>• Encourages colleagues to adopt sustainable behaviours</li> <li>• Applies knowledge of climate related risks to adapt maternal and newborn care in practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collects and analyses service-level data to identify areas where environmental impact can be reduced, such as single-use items, pharmaceutical waste, or unnecessary resource use in maternity care.</li> <li>• Positive feedback from colleagues on sustainability initiatives</li> <li>• Successful implementation of small-scale environmental improvement projects</li> <li>• Disseminates findings from sustainability or environmental health research through presentations, reports, or publications to inform improvements in SRMNAH services</li> </ul>

	Proficiency Levels	Key Indicators	Evidence examples
<b>Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads sustainability and climate-responsive initiatives across multiple teams or services</li> <li>Embeds environmentally responsible practices into care delivery, policy, and education, and develops others' capability in sustainable healthcare leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designs and leads multi-team environmental sustainability programs</li> <li>Integrates sustainability principles into clinical guidelines, education, and service design</li> <li>Mentors staff in environmentally responsible healthcare practices</li> <li>Collaborates with interdisciplinary partners to reduce environmental impact</li> <li>Monitors and evaluates environmental performance and outcomes</li> <li>Leads and supports others in integrating climate adaptation strategies into maternal and neonatal care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measurable and sustained environmental improvements across services</li> <li>Increased staff knowledge and competence in sustainability practices</li> <li>Recognition for leadership in environmentally responsible healthcare initiatives</li> <li>Integration of sustainability measures into policies, protocols, or training programmes</li> <li>Contributes to research or evidence-informed projects exploring sustainable models of midwifery care (e.g., continuity of care models, community-based care, or reduced travel through telehealth).</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes organisational and system-level strategy for environmental sustainability and climate resilience in midwifery and SRMNAH services</li> <li>Influences policy, governance, and culture to embed long-term, environmentally responsible, climate-adaptive healthcare practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops and leads organisational or regional sustainability strategies</li> <li>Influences policy, funding, and infrastructure decisions toward environmentally responsible healthcare</li> <li>Anticipates climate-related risks and integrates resilience and adaptation planning into SRMNAH services</li> <li>Fosters a culture of environmental accountability, stewardship, and innovation</li> <li>Builds leadership capacity in sustainability and climate-responsive practice across the workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation-wide reduction in environmental impact and improved sustainability metrics</li> <li>Sustainable policies and infrastructure changes embedded in governance structures</li> <li>Recognition as a leader or contributor to climate-responsive healthcare at professional or system level</li> <li>Demonstrated resilience planning and adaptation measures in SRMNAH services</li> <li>Workforce shows sustained competence and engagement in environmental sustainability practices</li> </ul>

# Conclusion

The Leadership Competencies framework supports the development of midwife leaders across diverse global contexts, strengthening health systems, improving maternal and newborn outcomes, and contributing to sustainable, equitable, and high-quality SRMNAH services worldwide. It enables midwives to develop leadership capabilities across practice settings and career stages, emphasising clinical credibility, relational care, equity, advocacy, strategic thinking, and ethical stewardship in line with ICM Global Standards.

The Leadership Competencies' tabulated format outlines competencies across proficiency levels, providing education and regulation institutions, employers, professional associations, and national health authorities with a common reference for developing, reviewing, and assuring leadership roles, creating standardised job descriptions, assessing capacity, addressing gaps, guiding performance management, succession planning, and professional development for midwifery leaders.

This resource will be updated regularly, and ICM welcomes feedback on its use. Please share your insights at [communications@internationalmidwives.org](mailto:communications@internationalmidwives.org).

# Glossary

<b>Active Listening</b>	communication approach in which the listener gives full, intentional attention to the speaker, attending to both verbal and non-verbal cues to understand meaning, intent, and emotion. It involves presence, engagement (such as eye contact and paraphrasing), clarifying questions, and reflective responses to confirm shared understanding.
<b>Advocacy</b>	The capacity to speak up for women, newborns, midwives, and communities, and to influence policies, resource allocation, and service design related to sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, and adolescent health (SRMNAH). Advocacy leadership requires political awareness, ethical courage, and the ability to engage with power structures to address inequities and the social determinants of health (3,4).
<b>Autocratic leadership</b>	A directive leadership style characterised by centralised authority and unilateral decision-making. While often associated with hierarchical structures, it may be effective in high-risk or time-critical contexts requiring rapid decisions.
<b>Climate responsive leadership</b>	Leadership that recognises and responds to the impacts of climate change on SRMNAH. In midwifery, this includes promoting environmentally sustainable maternity care, advocating for climate-resilient health systems, reducing the environmental footprint of services, recognising and supporting communities affected by climate-related health risks.
<b>Clinical leadership</b>	Leadership enacted by clinicians who use professional expertise to influence patient care, improve quality and safety outcomes, and guide multidisciplinary teams. Clinical leadership extends beyond direct care to include service improvement, advocacy for evidence-based practice, and contribution to organisational and systems improvement.
<b>Coaching</b>	A goal-focused, time-limited, and collaborative process that enables individuals or teams to enhance performance, capability, and self-directed learning. Coaching uses structured questioning, feedback, and reflective techniques to unlock potential, clarify goals, and support accountability, rather than providing directive advice or instruction.
<b>Coalition building</b>	The intentional development of collaborative partnerships with healthcare professionals, policymakers, community or civil society organisations, and service users to strengthen SRMNAH services. Coalition building emphasises shared purpose, mutual respect, and collective advocacy to improve outcomes for women, newborns, and families.

<b>Cultural safety</b>	An approach that extends beyond cultural competence to include critical reflection on power, privilege, institutional bias, and systemic inequities within health systems. Leadership for cultural safety involves creating environments where women and communities feel respected, heard, and safe, and where care is free from discrimination and coercion. Midwifery leaders have a responsibility to challenge culturally unsafe practices and support inclusive models of care (14,30).
<b>Democratic leadership (participative leadership)</b>	A style in which leaders involve team members in decision-making processes, encouraging dialogue and shared input while retaining overall accountability for final decisions.
<b>Ethical dilemma</b>	Situations in which a midwifery leader faces competing ethical principles, values, or professional obligations, where acting on one may compromise another. These dilemmas commonly arise when balancing women's rights and autonomy with professional standards, legal requirements, organisational policies, staff wellbeing, and resource constraints.
<b>Avoidable safety or ethical breaches</b>	Refers to incidents, accidents, or moral failings in a professional, research, or clinical environment that could have been prevented by following established protocols, exercising proper judgment, or maintaining safety standards.
<b>Formal or positional leadership</b>	Leadership exercised through an officially designated role within an organisational hierarchy, where authority, accountability, and decision-making powers derive from the position held rather than solely from personal influence. Formal leaders are appointed to coordinate resources, direct teams, and ensure organisational objectives are achieved.
<b>Interconnected environments</b>	The dynamic and reciprocal relationships between clinical settings, communities, health systems, social structures, and the natural environment. Midwifery leaders recognise that decisions in one domain affect others and apply systems-based thinking to support holistic, culturally safe, and sustainable SRMNAH services.
<b>Informal or distributed leadership (exercised through influence and expertise)</b>	Leadership that emerges from individuals without formal positional authority, but who influence others through expertise, credibility, and professional relationships. Distributed leadership conceptualises leadership as a collective, socially constructed process shared across multiple actors rather than concentrated in a single hierarchical role.
<b>Quality improvement</b>	Systematic efforts to enhance the safety, effectiveness, equity, and experience of care through the use of data, evidence, and reflective practice. Midwifery leaders play a key role in identifying gaps, implementing change, sustaining improvements, and translating evidence into routine practice at service and system levels (22).

<b>Rapid decision making</b>	The capacity to swiftly assess complex clinical, ethical, and organisational situations and take timely, evidence-informed action that prioritises the safety, dignity, and autonomy of women and newborns, particularly in urgent, unstable, or unpredictable SRMNAH contexts.
<b>Relational leadership</b>	An approach that emphasises trust, collaboration, mutual respect, and the co-construction of leadership through interpersonal relationships. Influence emerges through high-quality interactions rather than positional authority alone (34).
<b>Situational leadership</b>	Situations in which a midwifery leader faces competing ethical principles, values, or professional obligations, where acting on one may compromise another. These dilemmas commonly arise when balancing women’s rights and autonomy with professional standards, legal requirements, organisational policies, staff wellbeing, and resource constraints.
<b>Sponsor</b>	A sponsor is a senior colleague who actively advocates for your advancement, uses their influence to open doors, and publicly champions your abilities to decision-makers with power over your career.
<b>Strategic and systems leadership</b>	Leadership focused on long-term direction, organisational alignment, and sustainability. Strategic leadership involves setting vision and priorities, while systems leadership emphasises collaboration across organisational and sectoral boundaries to address complex, interdependent challenges within healthcare and other large systems.
<b>Stewardship</b>	The ethical and responsible management of human, financial, and environmental resources to sustain high-quality maternity care. Stewardship involves safeguarding professional standards, supporting workforce wellbeing, and ensuring maternity services remain equitable, effective, and sustainable for future generations.
<b>Strategic influence</b>	The ability to shape decisions beyond the immediate clinical environment, including contributing to policy development, governance, workforce planning, and health system reform. Strategic influence may be exercised with or without formal authority and requires systems thinking, negotiation skills, and alignment of midwifery priorities with broader health and development agendas (12).
<b>Transactional leadership</b>	A structured leadership style based on exchanges between leader and follower, where performance expectations are clarified and reinforced through rewards or corrective action. It emphasises stability, efficiency, and goal attainment.
<b>Transformational leadership</b>	A leadership style characterised by inspiring a shared vision, motivating followers to exceed expectations, cultivating innovation, and supporting individual development. Transformational leaders promote intrinsic motivation and organisational change.

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# Appendix 2 Leadership Competency Themes

Following a comprehensive thematic analysis and consultation with the Competency Development Working Group, it was concluded that, while all leadership competencies hold value, six are inherently embedded within other competencies and therefore do not stand alone. Specifically, **ethical awareness, stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and responsible decision-making** are already reflected within **People Leadership, Relational and Communicative Leadership, and Collaboration and Conflict Resolution** Competencies. Furthermore, **Compassion and Empathy, Ethical Integrity, and Stewardship** are consistently demonstrated across all other competencies. In addition, **Critical Thinking** was integrated into the **Systems and Strategic Thinking** competency due to the clear overlap in focus and application.

Maintaining these as separate competencies would result in unnecessary duplication and dilute focus, as the behaviours they represent are fully captured within the existing 12 midwife leadership competencies. By integrating these elements into the remaining competencies, the framework achieves greater clarity, reduces overlap, and strengthens its ability to assess leadership and collaborative effectiveness in a cohesive and streamlined manner.

Leadership Competencies following thematic analysis

Competency	Description
<b>Self-leadership and personal development</b>	Refers to self-awareness, reflective practice, emotional intelligence, resilience, and commitment to lifelong learning. Effective midwife leaders manage their own wellbeing, values, and professional growth to sustain leadership practice over time (6,7,8).
<b>People leadership</b>	Involves leading, motivating, and supporting individuals and teams through inclusive, respectful, and ethical management practices. This includes performance development, delegation, and cultivating psychologically safe work environments (9,10,11,12).
<b>Relational and communicative leadership</b>	Centres on building trust, effective communication, active listening, and relationship-based influence across professional and cultural boundaries. Relational leadership aligns strongly with midwifery values and is foundational to effective teamwork and collaboration (8,13,14,15).
<b>Clinical and ethical leadership</b>	Refers to leadership grounded in clinical expertise, professional standards, and ethical decision-making. Midwife leaders guide evidence-based practice, uphold professional integrity, and address ethical dilemmas in care provision (14,15,16).

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Systems and strategic thinking</b>	Involves understanding health systems as complex, interconnected environments and contributing to long-term planning, policy development, and system reform. This competency supports midwives to influence beyond the clinical setting (15,17,18,19,20).
<b>Collaboration and coalition building</b>	Refers to working effectively across disciplines, sectors, organisations, and communities to achieve shared goals. Coalition-building is essential for advancing midwifery priorities within broader health and social systems
<b>Advocacy, policy and social responsibility</b>	Encompasses the ability to advocate for women, newborns, communities, in SRMNAH, and the midwifery profession, in SRMNAH and to influence policies that address inequities and uphold human rights (3,4).
<b>Education, mentorship and capacity building</b>	Refers to developing others through teaching, coaching, mentorship, supervision, and workforce strengthening. Midwife leaders play a critical role in building leadership capacity across generations (2,8,26).
<b>Quality improvement, innovation and data literacy</b>	Involves leading continuous quality improvement, using data and evidence to inform decision-making, and cultivating innovation in service delivery and education (4,21,22).
<b>Equity, inclusion, and cultural safety.</b>	Refers to leadership that actively addresses power imbalances, discrimination, and systemic inequities, and promotes culturally safe, respectful care and workplaces (14,20,23).
<b>Crisis and operational leadership</b>	Refers to leadership that actively addresses power imbalances, discrimination, and systemic inequities, and promotes culturally safe, respectful care and workplaces (14,20,23).
<b>Ethical integrity and stewardship</b>	Refers to responsible leadership grounded in accountability, transparency, ethical governance, and stewardship of resources to ensure sustainability and public trust (30,34).
<b>Effective Communication</b>	Encompasses clear, timely, respectful communication across audiences and contexts, including clinical, Organizational, and policy settings (35,36).
<b>Compassion and Empathy</b>	Reflects leadership that is person-centred, emotionally intelligent, and responsive to the needs of women, newborns, families, and colleagues key to safe and respectful maternity care (3, 13,37).
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Reflects leadership that is person-centred, emotionally intelligent, and responsive to the needs of women, newborns, families, and colleagues key to safe and respectful maternity care (3, 13,37).
<b>Collaboration and conflict resolution</b>	Involves managing disagreement constructively, negotiating solutions, and maintaining effective relationships within teams and systems (14,30).
<b>Environment and Climate Sustainability</b>	Refers to integrating environmental awareness, sustainable practices, and climate responsive leadership into midwifery care, education, and service delivery. Involves promoting environmentally responsible decision-making, reducing healthcare environmental impact, and advocating for climate-resilient, equitable maternal and newborn services while influencing others toward sustainable change (31,32).

# Appendix 3: Methodology for Developing Midwife Leadership Competencies

A scoping review of both peer-reviewed and grey literature was undertaken to identify existing frameworks, models, and research relevant to leadership in midwifery. The review included searches of CINAHL, OVID, and professional midwifery and health leadership websites. Search terms included combinations of “midwifery,” “leadership,” “competency,” “capability,” “professional development,” and “healthcare leadership.”

Despite comprehensive searching, there was a notable paucity of research specifically examining leadership within midwifery, highlighting a significant gap in the literature. A total of 158 articles were initially retrieved, of which 114 were excluded due to irrelevance, duplication, or insufficient focus on leadership competencies in midwifery.

The remaining articles (44) were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts, skills, and behaviours associated with effective midwifery leadership. The thematic analysis followed the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (35), which involved:

1. Familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of included literature
2. Coding key ideas, statements, and descriptions of leadership practice
3. Collating codes into preliminary themes reflecting patterns across the literature
4. Reviewing and refining themes to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity

This process initially resulted in the identification of 18 themes, which were subsequently refined to 12 unique competencies by reducing duplication and consolidating overlapping concepts. These are shown in Table 1.

Following the literature review, consultation was conducted with members of the ICM Regional Professional Committees for the Western Pacific, South East Asia, and the Americas regions. Participants were engaged through structured discussion guided by key questions to refine the competencies. Consideration was given to:

## 1. Relevance

a) How essential is this competency for effective midwife leadership?

## 2. Clarity and Scope

a) Is the description clear, comprehensive, and understandable?

b) Are any elements ambiguous, missing, or unnecessary?

## 3. Contextual Applicability

a) Does this competency apply across different leadership levels (clinical, organisational, system)?

b) Are there contexts where this competency is particularly critical or less relevant?

## 4. Refinement Suggestions

a) Are there changes you would suggest to wording, structure, or focus?

The remaining RPCs (Africa, Europe, and Eastern Mediterranean) were not engaged during this stage due to the scheduling of their meetings, which occurred after the competencies had already been submitted through ICM's governance processes for ratification.

Through this iterative process of literature review, thematic analysis, and expert consultation, the final set of midwife leadership competencies was developed to ensure evidence-informed, contextually relevant, and globally adaptable guidance for professional development, organisational assessment, and leadership capacity building in midwifery.