



Issues Paper

White (coat) jobs: The EU health workforce

**Jobs for Europe:
The Employment Policy Conference**

**Sectors with high job-creation
potential**

Brussels, 6-7 September 2012

Main challenges

As highlighted in the Annual Growth Survey 2012, the health workforce plays an important role in the EU economy accounting for about 17.1 million jobs or 8% of all jobs in the EU 27¹. Employment in the sector increased from 2000 to 2010, creating 4 million new jobs. Even during the economic crisis, employment in the healthcare sector has continued to grow at around 5%, above the EU average for other sectors (~3%). There will be about 7 million job openings over the period 2010-2020 due to replacement needs. Together with net employment change, around 8 million total job openings are projected. Most jobs will require highly qualified people (more than 5m) while the need for medium qualified personnel will remain rather significant (around 3m). Around 200,000 jobs openings will be for people with lower qualifications.

With an ageing population (the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to almost double over the next 50 years from 87 million in 2010 to 153 million in 2060²) and the rising demand for healthcare, the sector will remain a key driver for providing jobs in the years to come.

Health Ministers³ have highlighted that the high job creation potential of the health sector could deliver job opportunities for young people at a time of very high youth unemployment. Innovative approaches need to be put in place to equip young people with the right skills through education and training.

However there are serious challenges facing the health workforce in the EU and many of these problems are common to all Member States:

- **Shortages of health professionals** are increasing while the health workforce itself is ageing with insufficient new recruits to replace those retiring. In 2009, about 30% of all doctors in the EU were over 55 and by 2020 more than 60 000 doctors or 3.2% of all European doctors are expected to retire annually. The Commission estimates a potential shortfall of around 1 million healthcare workers by 2020, rising up to 2 million if the long term care and ancillary professions are taken into account.
- **Health professionals are unevenly distributed between Member States** with a clear east-west asymmetry for doctors, nurses and dentists; this asymmetry is also present **between rural and urban areas within Member States**. Health workforce shortages in many Member States have increased the reliance on the recruitment of healthcare professionals from outside the EU.
- There are **difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in some health occupations** due to demanding working conditions and relatively low pay.
- The **emergence of new care patterns** to cope with multiple chronic conditions of the elderly and the **rise in new technologies and e-health** will require new skills and competences.

Given public budget constraints, health systems are under strong pressure to provide high quality healthcare cost-effectively and to make fundamental reforms in the way in which they deliver healthcare. EU health systems need to find innovative solutions through organisational changes, new technologies and products, which depend on a highly qualified and motivated health workforce of sufficient capacity and with the right skills to meet the growing demands of healthcare.

¹ Eurostat (2011) NACE Rev 2 categories 86&87

² Eurostat:Europop2010 population projections (online data code:proj_10c2150p)

³ Informal meeting of EU health ministers, 10 July 2012, Cyprus

What has the Commission done in this field?

Within the **Employment Package**, the Commission proposed an Action Plan for the EU Health Workforce, consisting of a range of initiatives to foster European cooperation and the exchange of good practices between Member States:

- **Improve workforce planning and forecasting.** To assist Member States to share information and data on the EU's health workforce, the Commission will launch a Joint Action on health workforce planning and forecasting by the end of 2012. Together with the OECD, the Commission will map education and training capacities for health professionals in the EU to help assess future training needs.
- **Better anticipate skill needs.** The Commission is supporting several initiatives to bring together experts from the fields of education, training and the health professions to assess skill needs and competencies required to meet future health needs. These include a pilot network of nurse regulators and educators sharing good practice on training requirements for healthcare assistants, a European Skills Council in the field of nursing and care and a pilot Sector Skills Alliance to set up a transnational partnership to promote cooperation between education and training providers and sector specific expertise.
- **Improve recruitment and retention.** A sustainable health workforce depends on the recruitment of young people into the health professions and on the retention of qualified experienced staff in a highly competitive global labour market. To help promote the exchange of good practices across Europe, the Commission will carry out an EU wide mapping study of innovative recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Promote ethical recruitment of health professionals.** The Joint Action on workforce planning will seek to improve data on migration in line with the principles of the WHO Global Code of Practice on the international recruitment of health personnel.

Member States are urged to maximise the use of European funding instruments, in particular the **European Social Fund** to boost education, training and jobs opportunities in the healthcare sector. The future "**Erasmus for All**" programme can offer support for cross-border education and training projects to develop new skills. The future **EU Health Programme** can further support the development of common tools to tackle health workforce shortages.

As concluded by the European Council on 28 June, Member States will need to develop more precise National Job Plans for the next European Semester. This could create an opportunity to mainstream the health workforce into the National Reform Programmes given its high job creation potential.

Best practices

In the UK, two ESF projects⁴ offer examples of tackling the issue through providing training in caring skills, helping to challenge stereotypes, improve care quality, and give the prospect of better conditions.

- **Care training East Midlands** has worked very closely with leading employers in the region to identify motivated candidates and smooth their path to better quality jobs in the social care sector.
- The **TransQual project** recognises that many care jobs are filled by migrants into the UK, many without a good command of English. Migrants fill a wide variety of essential roles in the labour market, and their presence is

⁴ <http://www.esf-works.com/themes/growth-industries/health-and-social-care>

fundamental to the care system continuing to operate. But care is a demanding role, and an ability to communicate well with people who receive care, and their families, is important. The project targets migrant care workers and has led the way in improving the quality of care available, and growing the sector.

Questions

- Which elements of the Action Plan for the EU health workforce would you prioritise for further action, both at national and European level?
- How can the EU help Member States to develop and promote innovative and effective recruitment and retention policies; in particular, how can the EU help to enhance the employability of the young and retain the older workforce?
- How can the EU strengthen synergies between its employment, education and health policies to better use the job creation potential of the health sector?