



Who cares for the health workforce?

Call for Action in response to the European Union parties' manifestos

15 May 2019

An analysis of election manifestos of parties participating in the forthcoming EU elections has shown that health is not a priority for most of them in spite of this topic being considered as highly important by citizens¹ The situation is especially worrisome for the health workforce: there is a total absence of the topic in the manifestos. We therefore call for EU parliamentarians and policymakers to pay more attention to health workforce issues.

1. The economic case: the health workforce is about 10% of the total workforce and demand for health workers is increasing. The education and employment of health workers account for up to 60% of total health costs and for how well the other 40% is used.
2. The equity of access to health services case: most, if not all EU Member States, experience shortages of health workers, as evidenced by the number of unfilled positions. In some countries, this is due to an insufficient training of new workers, and in others, mainly in Southern and Eastern Europe, this is due to emigration flows that reduce the availability of qualified health personnel. Inequities also result from imbalances in the geographical distribution of workers and the consequent limited coverage of services in rural and poor urban areas.
3. The competencies case: the rapidly changing burden of disease, with non-communicable and chronic diseases becoming more prevalent, to the spread of eHealth, mHealth, and artificial intelligence, and a more demanding users of services, make it imperative to equip health workers with competencies adapted to this new context.

Universal coverage and people-centered health services require a workforce that is sufficient numerically, and that has the competencies and motivation to provide the services that correspond to the needs of European citizens.

We urge future parliamentarians and future commissioners to consider supporting Member States' efforts to build a health workforce fit to 'Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages', the Sustainable Development Goal, which all Heads of States have committed to pursue. While respecting the autonomy of its Member States in organising and managing their health system, the EU can help in various ways:

¹ EUPHA statement (2 May 2019), 'What are the European Union political parties planning for your health? A response to the European Union parties' manifestos'. Available at: https://eupha.org/repository/advocacy/EUPHA_statement_What_are_the_European_Union_political_parties_planning_for_your_health.pdf

- By supporting research to understand what makes the health workforce more efficient, e.g. how to better divide and organise work and how to use the full potential of existing and future workers. This is a pre-requisite to the design of evidence-informed policies.
- By facilitating the sharing of lessons from successful and less successful interventions to improve the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of the health workers, e.g. in the areas of recruitment, deployment and retention of health staff, in the governance, regulation and management of the whole workforce, from the most qualified to community workers and carers.
- By motivating, through advocacy and incentives, country authorities to invest in the building of an effective and efficient health workforce as a strategy that not only aims at improving the well-being of citizens, but also at contributing to economic development.



EUPHA section Health Workforce Research (HWR)
<https://eupha.org/health-workforce-research>

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