Health Workforce Crisis everywhere: What can we do?

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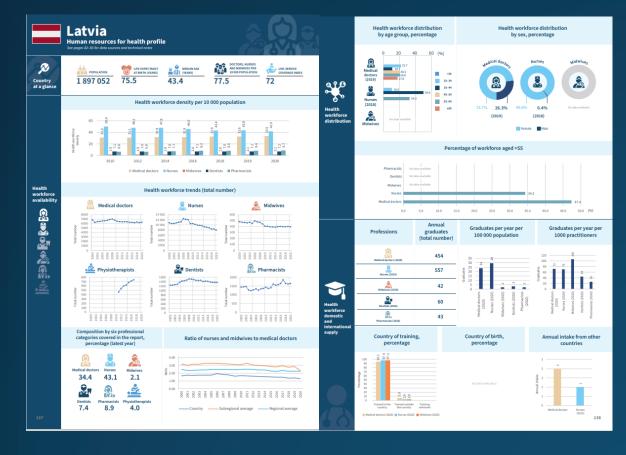
Tomas Zapata





Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act

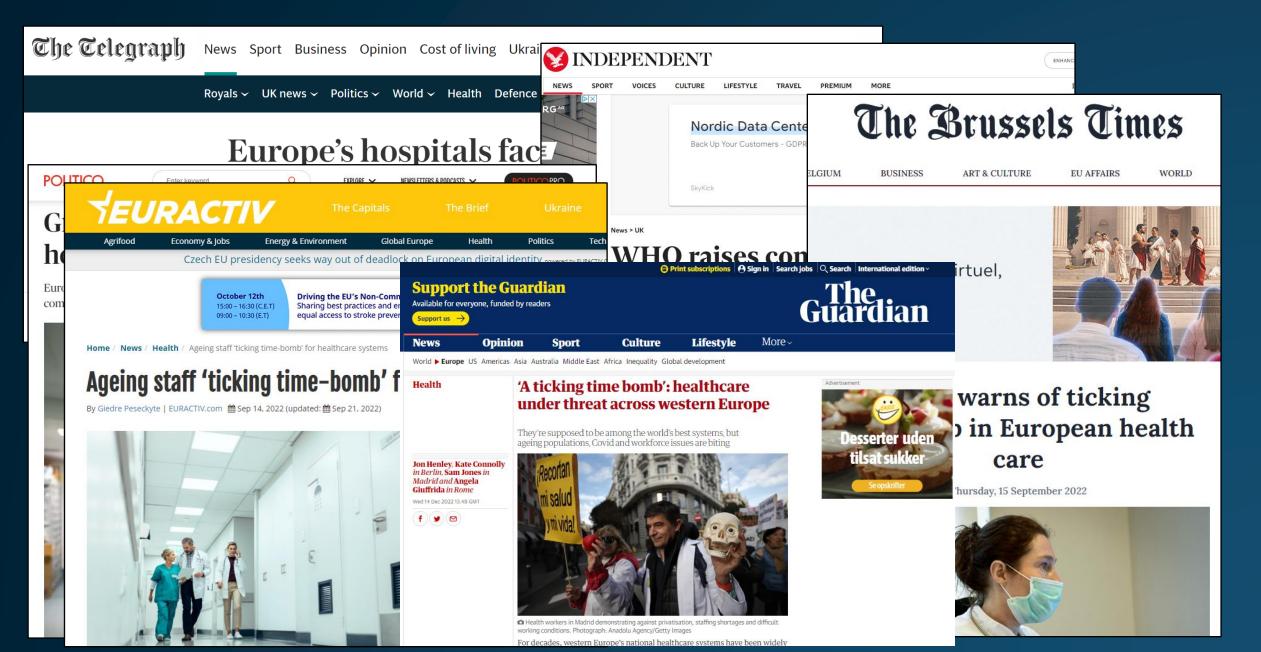




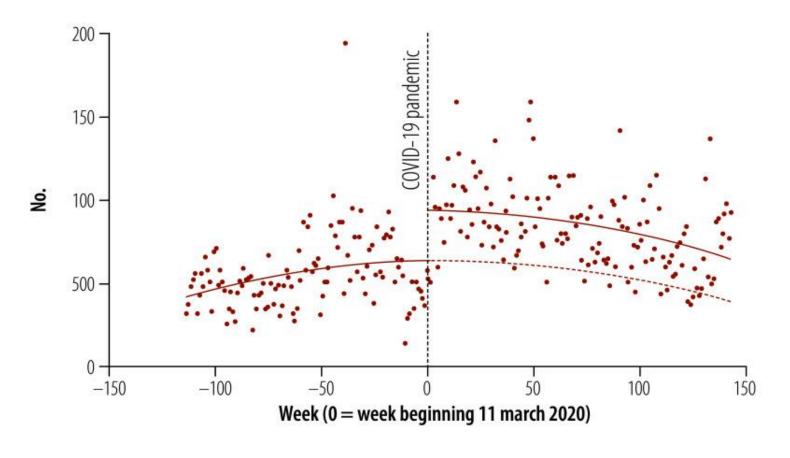




The report has made headlines...



24% Increase in the Total health worker protest activity globally, 2018–2022

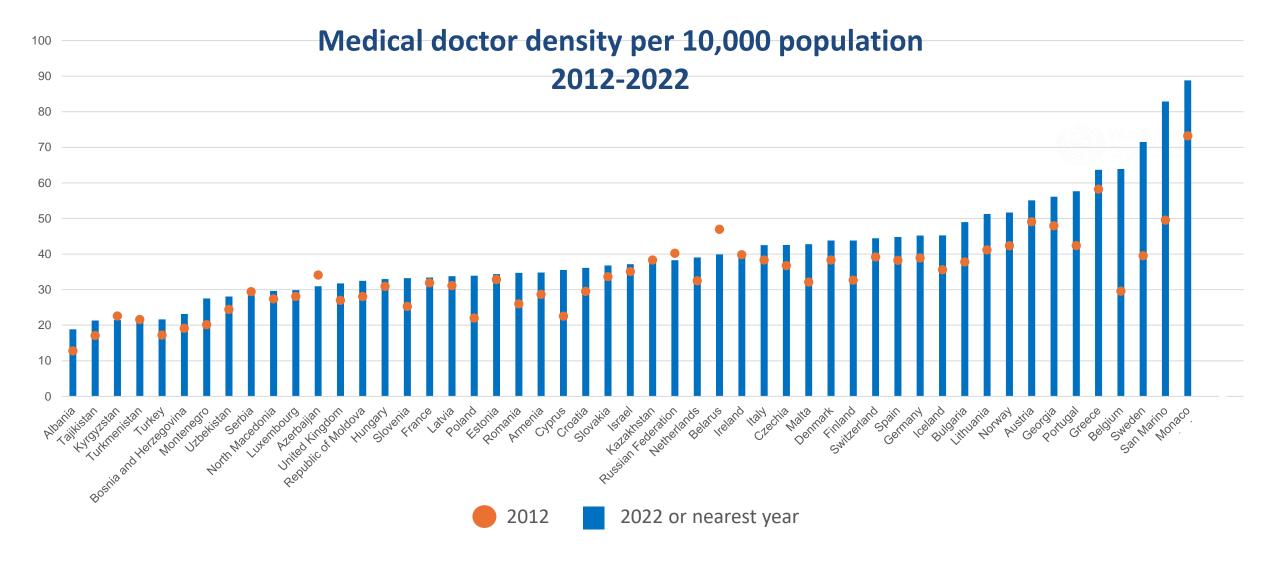




Source: Sharma, Kartik, Brophy, Sorcha, Law, Michael & Sriram, Veena. (2024). Health worker protests and the COVID-19 pandemic: an interrupted time-series analysis. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 102 (9), 650 - 656. World Health Organization. http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.23.290330

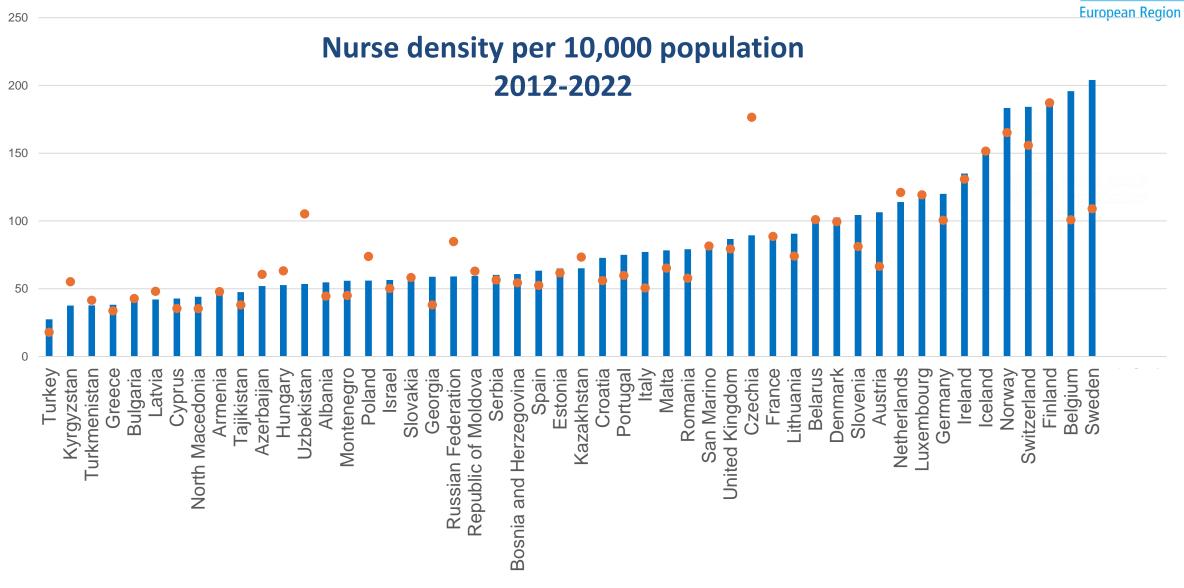
Increase of 20% of the density of doctors in the European Region





Increase of 8% of the density of nurses in the European Region

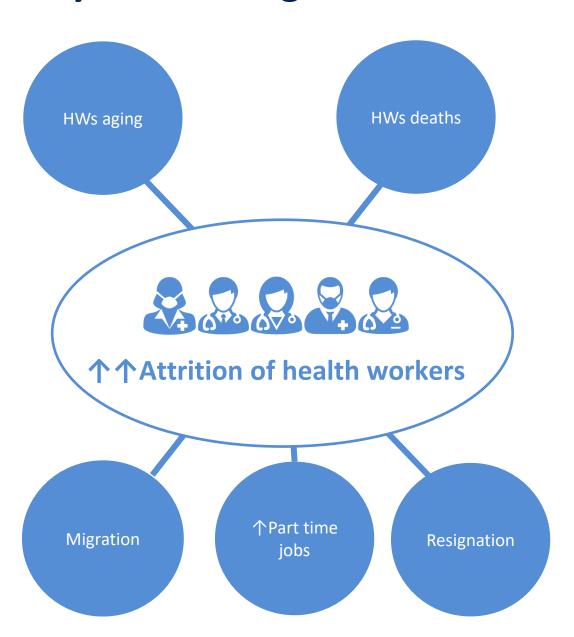






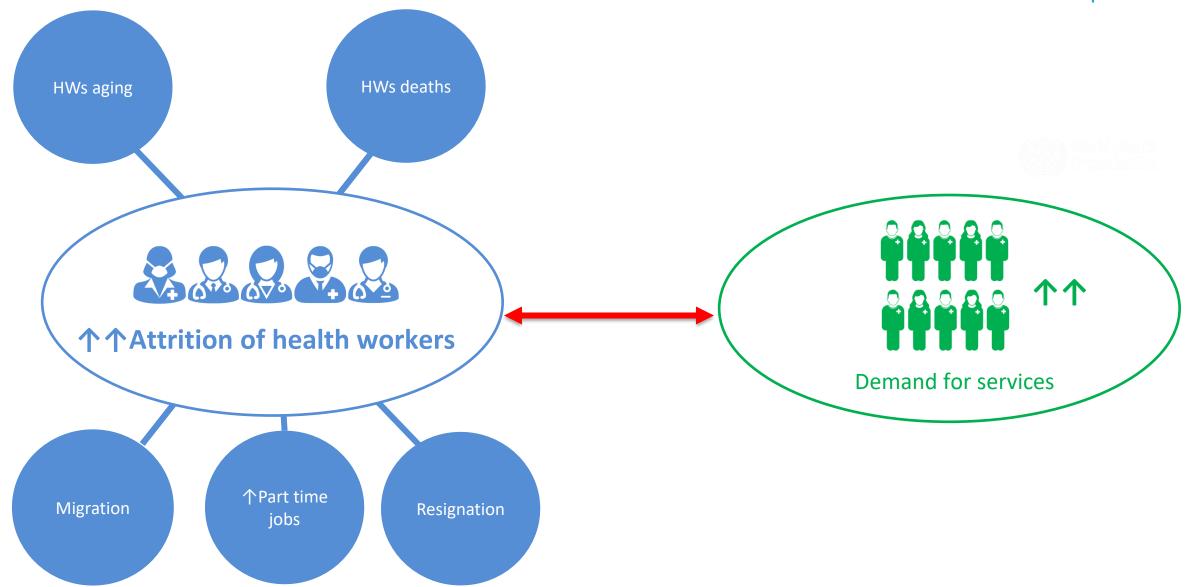




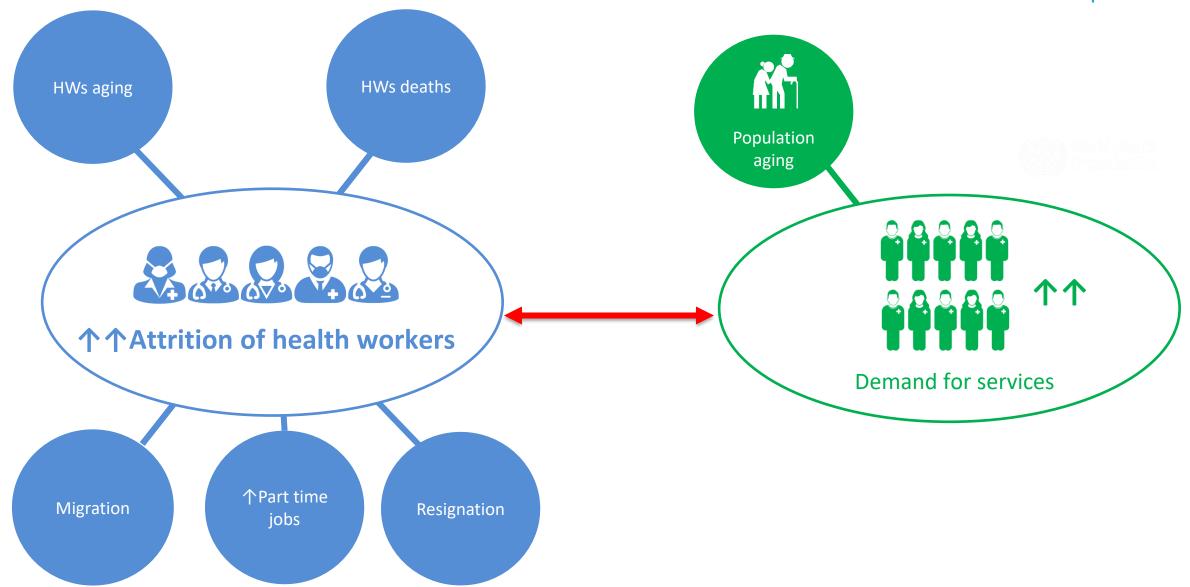




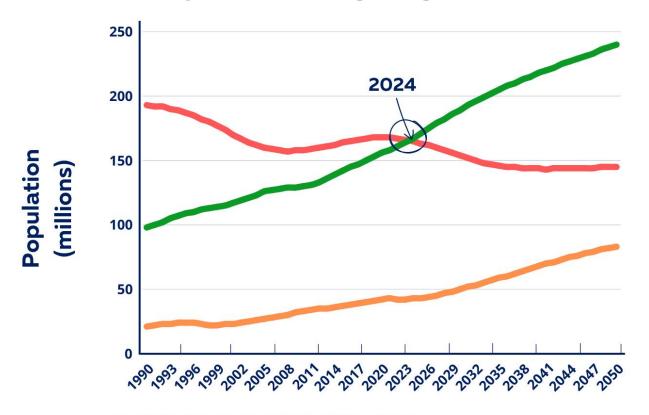








Population ageing has been accelerating in the WHO European Region, and fertility rates are going down....



Population by age groups from 1990 to 2050 Source: World Population Prospects 2022 (UN DESA (2022).









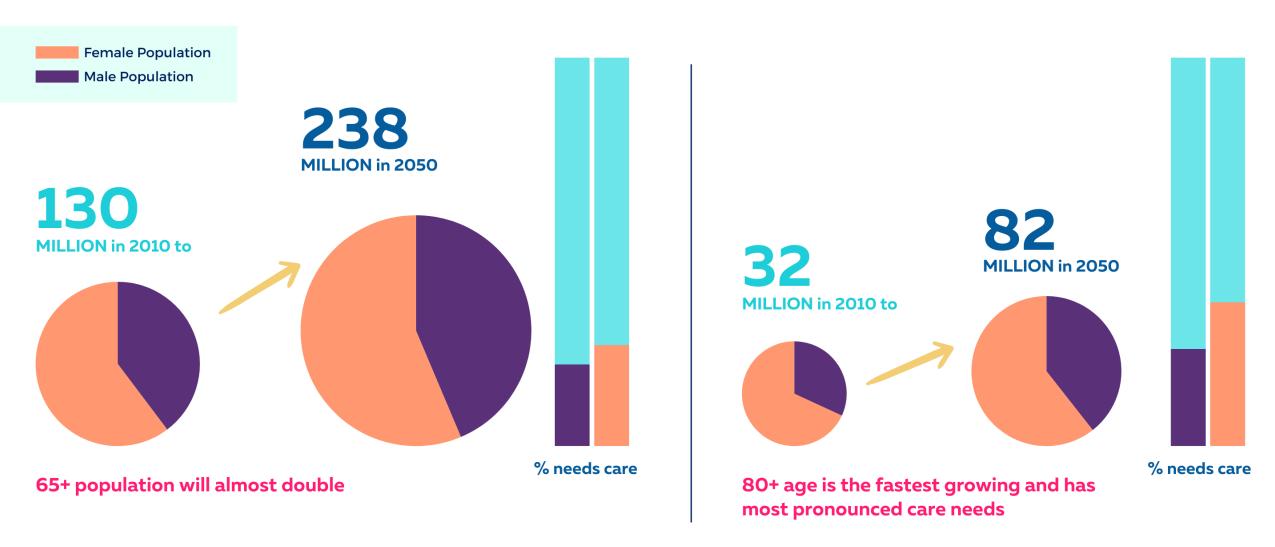




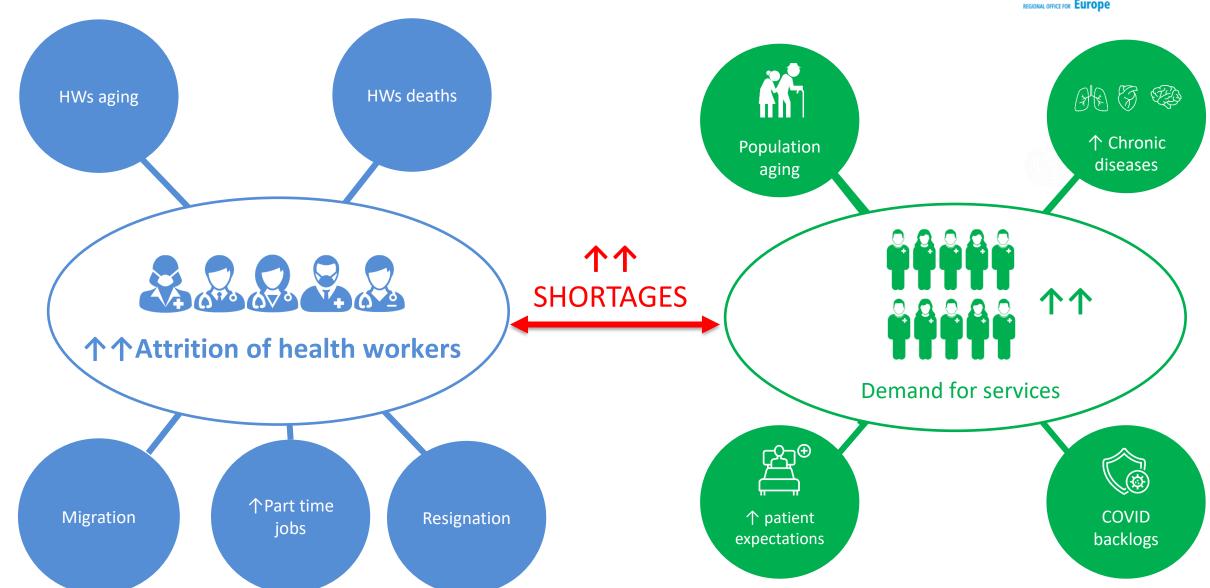
Projected Care Needs and Gender Disparities in 65+ and 80+ Populations:



















High-level Regional Meeting TIME TO ACT

22-23 March 2023, Bucharest, ROMANIA





































Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030





INVEST

- Increase public investment and optimise use of funds
- Make the economic and social case for investing in the health and care workforce



BUILD SUPPLY

- Modernise education and training
- Strengthen continuous professional development
- Build digital health competencies



RETAIN & RECRUIT

- Improve working conditions and ensure fair remuneration
- Safeguard health and wellbeing
- Ensure policies that address gender inequality and have zero tolerance for abuse and violence
- Attract young students
- Recruit and retain in rural and underserved areas
- Address outmigration; ethical recruitment





OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE

- Redefine teams and skill mix
- Improve interactions with patients
- Promote appropriate use of digital technologies
- Reconfigure services to be more efficient



PLAN

- Plan and forecast needs
- Adopt intersectoral planning approach
- Strengthen capacity of HRH units
- Regulate education, service delivery and professions
- Strengthen HRH information systems

Adopted by 53 Member States at WHO Regional Committee for Europe 73, October 2023, Astana



OPINION



- WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark
- WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 3 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark

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Fixing the health workforce crisis in Europe: retention must be the priority

Tomas Zapata, ¹ Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, ² Martin McKee, ³ Hans Kluge⁴

Health and care workers in all parts of Europe are experiencing overwork, with high levels of burnout.
They describe feeling undervalued and disaffected and are losing trust in the systems in which they work.

Output

Description:

Strikes by health workers should be seen as red flags, pointing to serious underlying problems, but they are now taking place in several European countries.⁷⁸ Less visible is the steady loss of skilled workers, with many attracted by the improved work life belonge

assumes that those highly pressurized workers now in post have capacity to provide the clinical training required. A more immediate solution is to recruit from elsewhere, but this raises important ethical issues. The obvious conclusion is that policies should prioritise retention of existing staff, with increased training offering only a partial, and long term answer. But how?

Health professionals are highly educated people.





RETAIN NURSES.

Commit to and invest in our existing workforce to stem the number of nurses leaving the profession.

RECRUIT NURSES.

Focus policy and mobilize efforts to make nursing an attractive profession, ensuring a workforce that can meet future demands.





Participating countries



Bulgaria

Cyprus

Estonia

Finland

France

Greece

Ireland

Italy

Latvia

Lithuania

Malta

Netherlands

Norway

Poland

Portugal

Romania

Slovenia

Spain

Sweden





Key partners





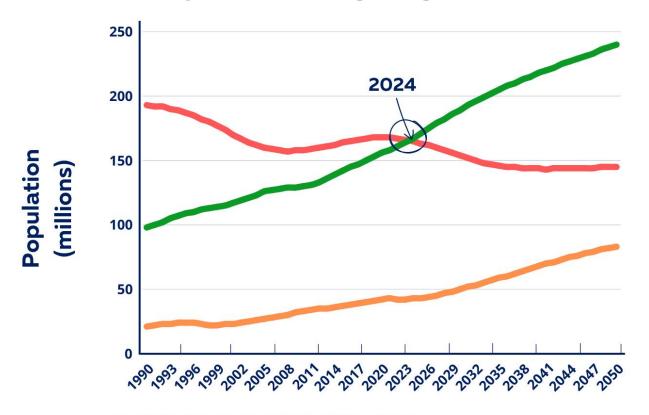








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Population by age groups from 1990 to 2050 Source: World Population Prospects 2022 (UN DESA (2022).













ICT professions are more attractive for 15 years old than health professions

Percentage-point change of students who expect to work as the following when they are about 30 years old

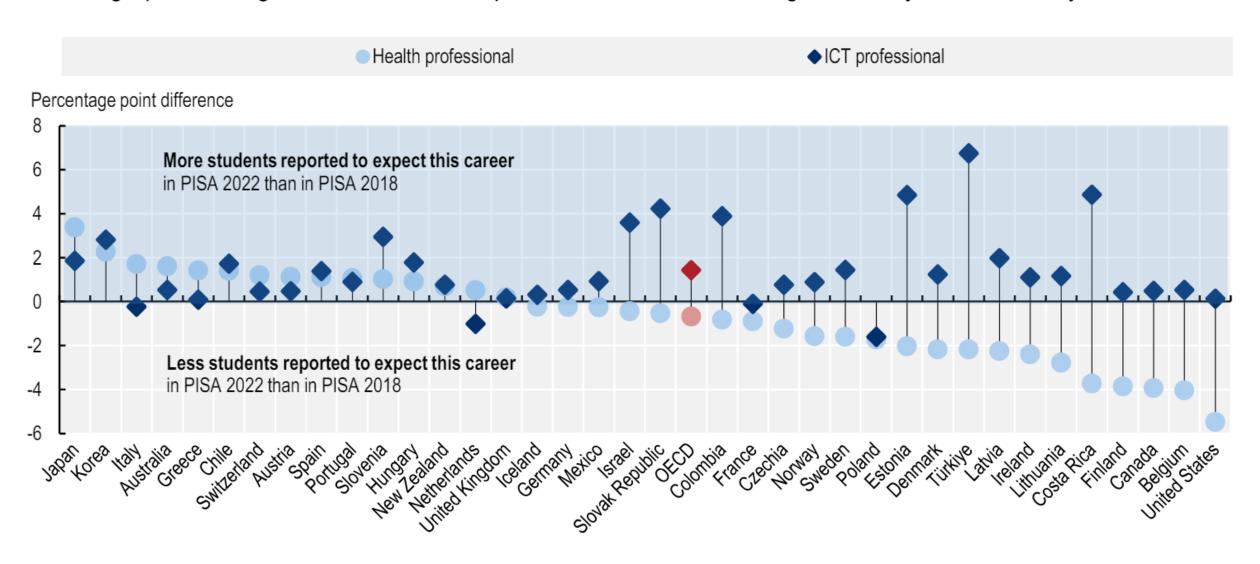
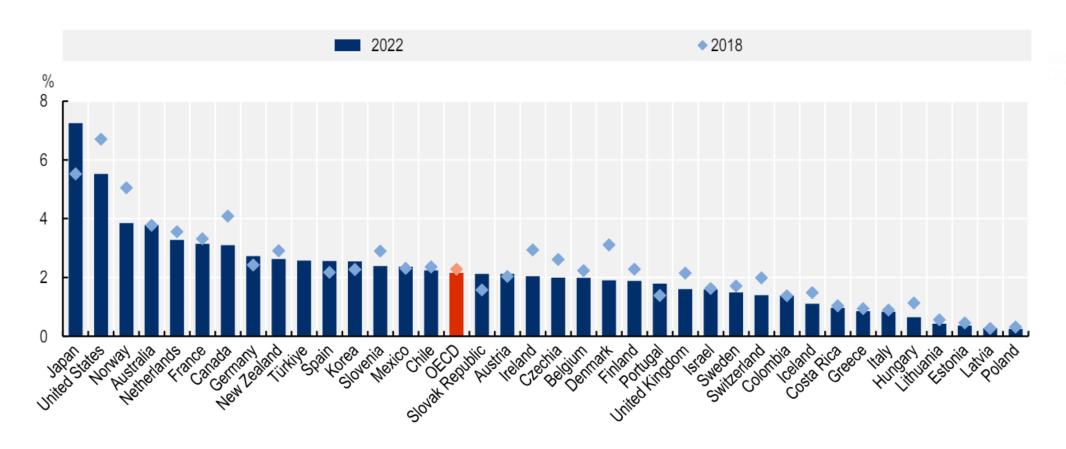




Figure 1. Nursing interest among 15-year-olds fell in half of OECD countries between 2018 and 2022



Note: Luxembourg did not participate in PISA 2022. Data from Türkiye for PISA 2018 is not included due to low reliability. Source: OECD, PISA 2018 and 2022 Database.

How to attract the new generations?

World Health Organization
European Region

- Sense of purpose, impact
- Make it stimulating, sttractive
- Innovation
- Carers of the planet
- Learning throughout the professional life
- Flexibility (work-life balance)
- Geographical mobility

WHO Guidelines on health workforce retention

1. Education	Strength of recommendations	Certainty of evidence
Enrol students with a rural background in health worker education program es	Strong	Moderate ⊕⊕⊕○
Locate health worker education facilities closer to rural areas	Conditional	⊕⊕○○
3. Bring students in health worker education programmes to rural and remote communities	Strong	⊕⊕○○
4. Align health worker education with rural health needs	Strong	⊕⊕○O
5. Facilitate continu ng education for rural and remote health workers	Strong	⊕⊕OO

2. Regulation	Stren gth of recommen dations	Certainty of evidence
6. Enable rural health workers to enhance their scopes of practice to better meet the needs of their communities	Conditional ⊕O	⊕⊕OO
7. Expand rarg e of health worker occupations to meet rural health needs	Conditional	Low ⊕⊕○○
8. Ers ure that compulsory service agreements respe ct the rights of health workers and are accompanied with appropriate support and incentives	Conditional	Low OOO
9. Tie education subsidies for health workers to agreements for return of service in rural areas and remote areas	Conditional	⊕⊕OO

3. Incentives

10. Provide a package of attractive incentives to influence health workers' decisions to relocate to or remain in a remote or rural area

4. Personal and professional support

- 11. Improve living conditions in rural and remote areas
- 12. Ens ure workplace safety in rural and remote health facilities
- 13. Ers ure decent work for health workers
- in rural and remote areas
- 14. Foster the creation of health workforce support networks
- 15. Develop and strengthe n career pathways for rural health worker s
- 16. Facilitate knowledge excharg e between health workers
- 17. Raise the profile of rural health workers

WHO guideline on health workforce development, attraction, recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas

An update of the WHO guideline

Conditional

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Strong

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Conditional

 \oplus O

Strong

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Low

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Low

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Low $\oplus \oplus \bigcirc \bigcirc$

Very low

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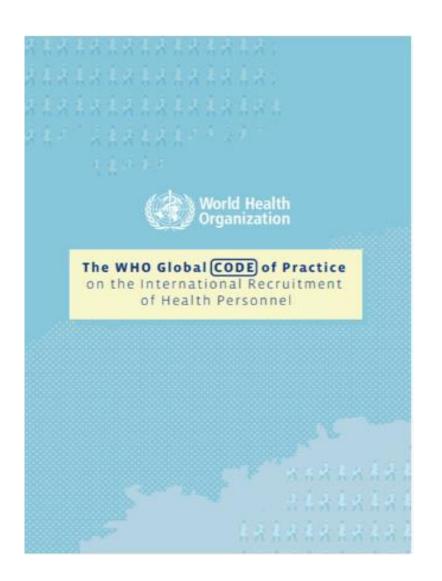
Addressing Migration & Mobility of Health Workers



WHO Europe Case
Studies on Migration of
Health Workers

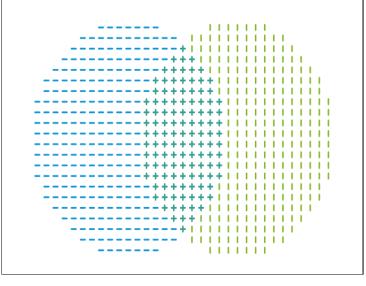
(Norway, Ireland, Malta, Romania, Albania, Tajikistan)

June 2025



Bilateral agreements on health worker migration and mobility

Maximizing health system benefits and safeguarding health workforce rights and welfare through fair and ethical international recruitment



Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030





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OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE

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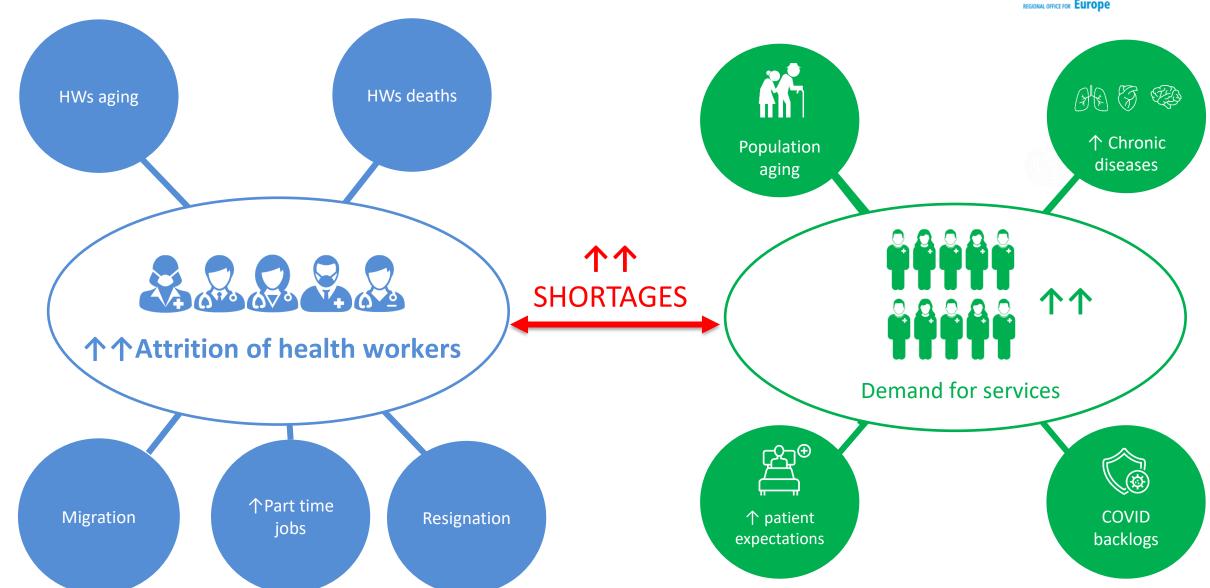


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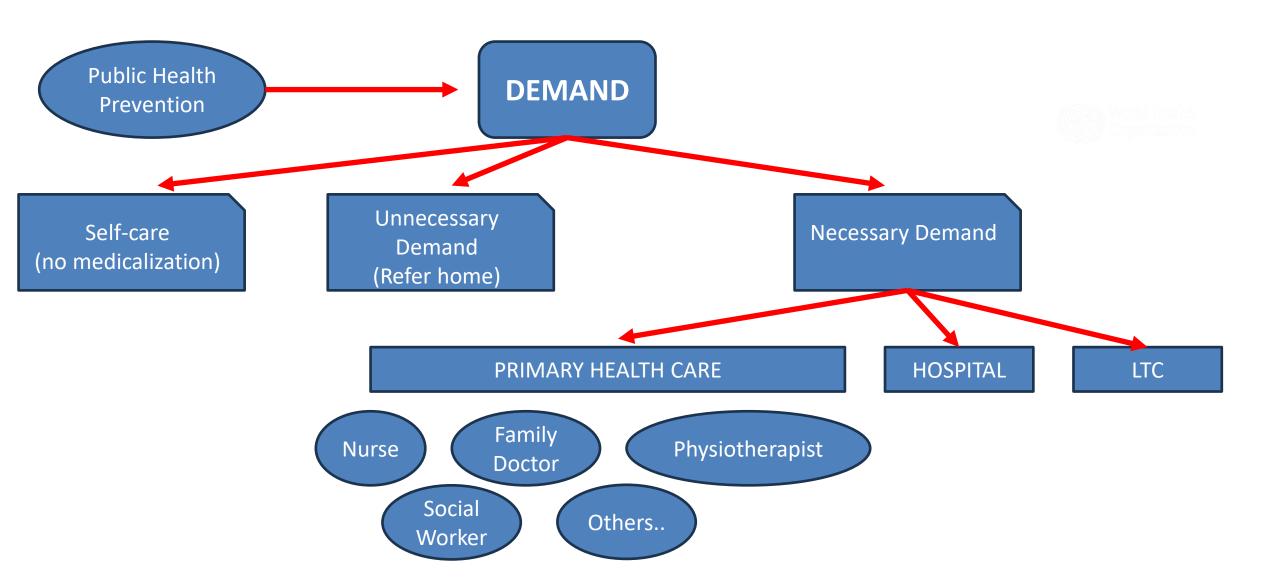






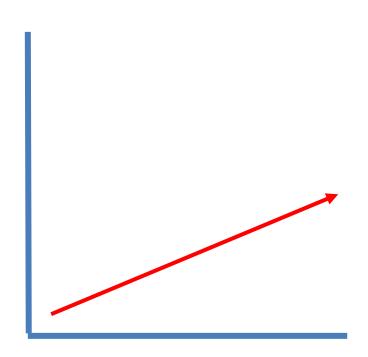
How to manage Demand?





How do we think about future health systems?

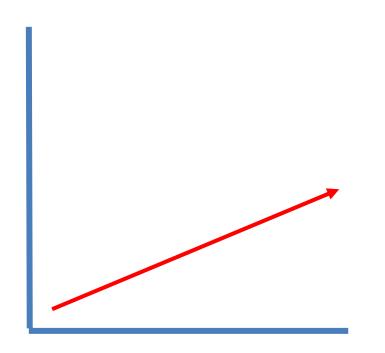


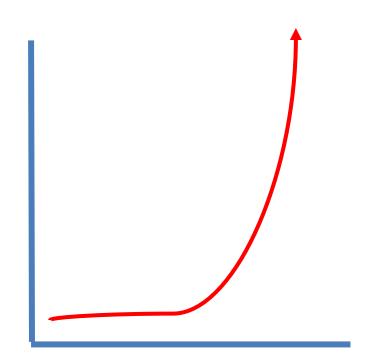




How do we think about future health systems?





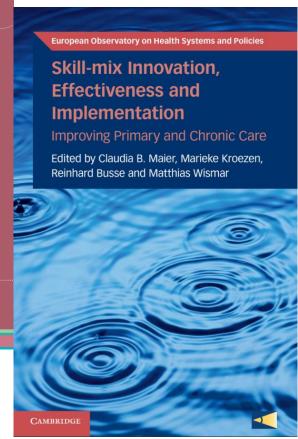


1-Redefine teams and skill mix

World Health Organization European Region

- 1. Task Sharing This helps to fill gaps in health services, particularly in areas with staff shortages.
- 2. Enhancing the Role of nurses, pharmacists...
- 3. Promoting Multidisciplinary Teams & Collaborative practice.
- Continuous Professional Development and Training.



































2-Transform health services to become more effective and efficient

World Health Organization European Region

- From Hospitals to Primary Care & Community (LTC)
- From Treatment to Prevention
- From Analogical to Digital

Example from Madrid, Spain. Patient and service flow optimisation. Dr Javier Arcos



Automated Clinical Pathway Standardization / Reducing workload and improving outcomes through Digital Health

THE HEALTHCARE PARADOX

The 60 30 10 Challenge*

60% of care is in line with evidence- or consensus-based

guidelines

30% is some form of waste or of low value

10% is harmful

Prioritizing quality and sustainability to meet the demands of modern healthcare

The triple imperative: digital transformation, human resources and governance and management Innovative HRH approaches to fase the urgency **Automated Clinical Pathway Standardization** Reducing workload and improving outcomes through Digital Health Dr. Javier Arcos, Medical Director,

































Responding to people's needs







3-Digital Health Technologies/Al



- **1. Respond** to patient and health systems needs
- 2. Engage patients and health workers in development
- 3. Simple to use
- Means to an end
- 5. The "High Touch" of health workers should note be replaced by the "High Tech".
- 6. Complementary not supplementary.
- 7. Train health workers on DH/AI

































Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030





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Adopted by 55 at WHO Regional Committee for Europe 73, October 2023, Astana

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Adopted by World Health at WHO Regional Committee for Europe 73, October 2023, Astana

Workshop on Unlocking the Power of Data and Human Resources for Health Information Systems to Support Health and Care Workforce Development in the WHO European Region





Summary Report 25 March 2025

Background

The 53 Member States of the WHO European Region have endorsed the EUR/RC73/8 framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030. This framework recognizes the data challenges and aims to enhance human resources for health information systems (HRHIS) for supporting policy decision-making. WHO is assisting countries in evaluating their HRHIS and strengthening data collection, reporting and utilization.

HRH directors, GCNMOs and data focal points from 36 countries participated in this workshop to discuss improving the generation and use of HRH data as well as HRH information systems. The role of NHWA in improving HRH data and indicators to monitor the progress was part of this discussion.

Workshop objectives

- Improve the quality and use of health workforce data through the National Health Workforce Accounts (NHWA) and WHO/Europe, OECD, and Eurostat joint questionnaire (JQ) non-monetary healthcare statistics
- Share best practices and develop actionable improvement plans to strengthen HRHIS across the WHO European Region.
- 3. Foster dialogue and collaboration among health workforce focal points to support the implementation of the framework and enhance regional health workforce development

Overview of Programme

Panel Discussion:

- Discussed the future of data and human resources for health information systems with experts from Eurostat, OECD, and WHO.





Planning is like sailing....



Plan long, Act short, Monitor frequently, Have the right people on board







We reaffirm the critical role our health and care workers have played during the [coronavirus disease] COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of strengthening our workforces to build more resilient health systems. We underscore the need to make health-workforce planning and supply capability a priority so that, by 2025, all small countries will have developed and implemented national strategies for human resources for health. The SCI Working Group on Human Resources for Health in Small Countries in the European Region will continue to take this process forward and target country support and action across the SCI network.

Small Countries Ministerial Statement, Montenegro, 2022 ... Further action across the SCI countries will be on agreed priorities, development and implementation of national human resources for health strategies, organization of an executive course on human resources for health leadership and management, and technical support on retention and continuous professional development This will be aligned with the Region-wide draft framework for action on the health and care workforce currently in development and the recently adopted Bucharest Declaration on the health and care workforce.

Small Countries Ministerial Statement, Luxembourg, 2023 .. We are guided by the Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023-2030, the opportunity provided to us to build up HRH executive leadership in our countries and continued collaboration with the support of the SCI Working Group on HRH. ... We thank the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia for hosting the meeting of the SCI Working Group on HRH: accelerating trust and transformation, in December 2023, where we stressed the importance of digital competence for our workforces and its integration into all training, regulations and service design.....

Small Countries Ministerial Statement, 2024

Health workforce strategy in Latvia

Final Report













Small Countries Working Group on Human Resources for Health



- ✓ 2 countries (Latvia, Malta) have standalone HRH strategies/plans in place.
- ✓ 4 countries (Estonia, Iceland, Monaco, San Marino) have integrated HRH strategies in place.
- ✓ 3 countries (Andorra, Cyprus, Luxembourg) have integrated HRH strategies/plans under development.
- ✓ 2 countries (Slovenia, Montenegro) have standalone HRH strategies under development.
- ✓ 4 countries (Malta, Latvia, Andorra, Montenegro) are using or planning to use the HRH planning tool.

What is being done for each pillar?



Retain and recruit

Cyprus

- Remuneration of community nurses and midwives
- Autonomous work outside of hospitals

Latvia

 NEW! Setting up information platform connecting new doctors with hospitals to get info for next placement

Luxembourg

 Funding student placements in nursing and medicine.

Malta and Montenegro

Salary increases

Optimize performance

Cyprus

NEW! HealthCare Provider (HCP)
 position to support and optimize
 nurse performance; more focus on
 direct patient care

Iceland

- NEW! telemedicine for dermatology. addresses specialist shortages.
- NEW! medication technicians in hospital wards prepare meds; saves time and money for hospitals

Malta

Telemedicine in PHC

North Macedonia

NEW! role of health promotion nurse in PHC

Build supply

Andorra

NEW! professional nursing assistants degree

Luxembourg

• Bachelor's degree nursing sciences

San Marino

 University course in PHC for greater nurse autonomy

Slovenia

Opening 3rd faculty of medicine and more study spots

What is being done for each pillar? World Healt Organization

Plan

Andorra

 Work with professional associations to understand need for HCPs

Latvia

NEW! Digitalization of planning process:
 Modernization of registry and elaboration of planning and forecasting model

Malta

Implementation of HWF planning tool

North Macedonia

 Health labour market analysis supported by WHO, national workshops, data flow and information system

Invest

Latvia

• **NEW!** financial benefit passing practice to new doctors (e.g. 5439 Euro to 16317 Euro new doctors) = 48 new practices!

Malta

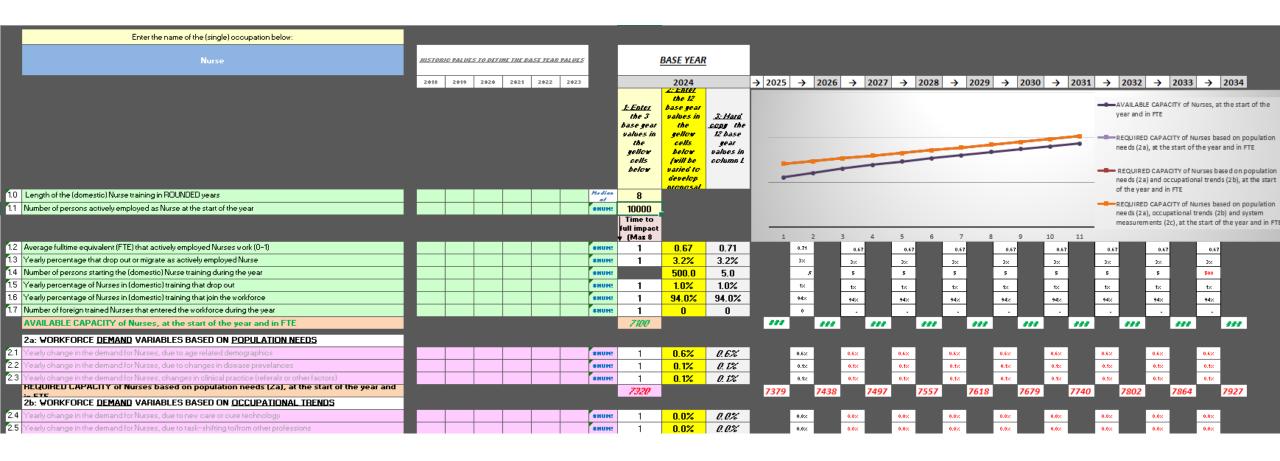
- Engaging stakeholders such as educational institutions
- training to increase supply and upskill HWF

Slovenia

NEW! Scholarship funding for certain health professions

WHO Europe HWF planning tool





Symposium on Health Workforce Planning and Optmizing



28-30 April, Copenhagen



Plan de acción sobre el personal sanitario y asistencial de la Región de Europa de la OMS (2023-2030)





INVERTIR

inversión pública y optimizar el empleo de los fondos

 Argumentar a favor de la inversión en personal sanitario y asistencial



FORMAR

- Modernizar la educación y la formación
- Potenciar el desarrollo profesional permanente
- Desarrollar las capacidades relacionadas con la salud digital



FIDELIZAR EL TALENTO

- Mejorar las condiciones de trabajo y garantizar una remuneración justa
- Proteger la salud y el bienestar
- Introducir políticas dirigidas a combatir las desigualdades de género y garantizar la tolerancia cero frente al maltrato y a la violencia
- Atraer a los estudiantes jóvenes
- Contratar y retener a trabajadores en zonas rurales y desfavorecidas
- Abordar el éxodo de personal y aplicar procedimientos éticos de contratación



OPTIMIZAR EL RENDIMIENTO

- Redefinir equipos y la combinación de capacidades
- Mejorar las interacciones con los pacientes
- Fomentar la aplicación adecuada de las tecnologías digitales
- Reorganizar los servicios para hacerlos más eficientes



PLANIFICAR

- Prever necesidades
- Aplicar un enfoque intersectorial
- Potenciar las capacidades de las unidades de recursos humanos para la salud
- Regular la educación, la prestación de servicios y las profesiones
- Reforzar los sistemas de información relativa a los recursos humanos para la salud

Aprobado por 53 Estados miembros World Health del Comité Regional Para Furopa en su sésión 73, celebrada en octubre de 2023 en Astaná









World Health Organization

















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Moving from health workforce crisis to health workforce success: the time to act is now

Open Access • Published: October 26, 2023 • DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100765 •



Contributors

Declaration of

interests

Acknowledgements

References

Article info

Europe is in the middle of a health workforce crisis. But this crisis is many crises at once: it is labour crisis, a mental health crisis, an education crisis, a gender equality crisis and a financial investment crisis.

First, it is a **labour crisis** because countries are finding it difficult to retain the existing health and care workers in the health system and recruit new to adequately respond to the increased demand for health services over the past few years. There is an increased attrition of health workers that is due to: an aging workforce (in 13 countries in Europe more than 40% of the doctors are over 55 years of age); increased absenteeism and resignations (62% increase during the COVID-19 pandemic); increased number of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic (50,000 health workers in Europe are estimated to have died); and increased migration of health and care workers in certain countries (27% and 79% increase in the global migration to OECD countries after the COVID-19 pandemic).

Second, it is a **mental health crisis** because health and care workers are experiencing high burnout (52% of health workers report to have experienced burnout). Health workers were exposed to high workloads and working times before the COVID pandemic and the situation has been exacerbated during and after the COVID pandemic. Stress, anxiety, depression have been common symptoms experienced by health and care workers and that are contributing to increase attrition, dissatisfaction, and reduced productivity.









- Create the working conditions so that Health and Care Workers can thrive, fully develop their passion and vocation and enjoy while caring for patients
- Optimize the performance of HWs, innovate, it is critical in the mid-long term

Gracias

For more information, please contact:

Health workforce and service delivery unit

Division of Country Health Policies and Systems

World Health Organization, regional office for Europe



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