

**Twelfth High-level Meeting of the Small Countries Initiative**  
4-5 June 2026 / Riga, Latvia

**From Scarcity to Sustainability:**  
Can Small Nations Lead Workforce Innovations?

# Latvia statement – From Scarcity to Sustainability: Can Small Nations Lead Workforce Innovations?

## Twelfth High-level Meeting of the Small Countries Initiative 4-5 June 2026 Riga, Latvia

We, the Ministers and high-level delegates of the Member States of the Small Countries Initiative (SCI) and partners, met in Riga, Latvia on 4–5 June 2026 for the Twelfth High-level Meeting of the Small Countries Initiative, “From scarcity to sustainability: can small nations lead workforce innovations?”

The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress, share experiences and strengthen cooperation in addressing the evolving challenges facing health systems in small countries. Our discussions build on previous SCI commitments and contribute to the implementation of WHO’s *Second European Programme of Work, 2026–2030 – “United Action for Better Health”* and the *Framework for action on the health and care Workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030*.<sup>2</sup>

We recognize that the health and care workforce is fundamental to health security and resilient health systems. The capacity of our countries to maintain essential services, protect population health and respond effectively to emergencies depends on a strong, skilled and well-supported health and care workforce.

We acknowledge that health security threats are intensifying, including pandemics, geopolitical instability, armed conflicts, climate-related events, cyber risks and supply chain disruptions. In small countries with limited surge capacity and health and care workforce pools, these pressures highlight the critical importance of strengthening health and care workforce preparedness, protection and emergency planning.

We recognize the growing impact of demographic change. Population ageing is increasing demand for continuous and integrated health care, while the health and care workforce itself is ageing rapidly. These dual ageing dynamic places additional pressure on health systems and requires forward-looking health and care workforce strategies.

We acknowledge that health and care workforce shortages, geographical imbalances and migration pressures challenge service delivery. Rural and remote areas in particular face difficulties attracting and retaining health professionals. We commit to strengthening policies that promote equitable health and care workforce distribution and sustainable health and care workforce supply.

We commit to strengthening health and care workforce governance, planning and investment, including improving health and care workforce data, forecasting future needs, and aligning education and training with evolving population health demands.

We emphasize the importance of protecting and supporting the health and care workforce. Improving working conditions, supporting mental health and well-being, and ensuring safe and supportive working environments are essential for health and care workforce retention and performance. As attacks on health care have increased in recent years, it is important to continue track these incidents to inform protective measures and support safer working environments.

We commit to optimizing the capability of the existing health and care workforce, including strengthening multidisciplinary teamwork, introducing task-sharing to enable health and care professionals to apply their knowledge and skills as effectively as possible, upskilling, expanding nursing leadership and advanced practice roles, and promoting integrated models of health and social care that respond to the needs of ageing populations.

We recognize the potential of digital solutions and innovation to support health and care workforce sustainability, improve access and quality outcomes, and strengthen health system resilience. We will promote responsible and ethical use of secure and effective digital tools, including telehealth and artificial intelligence, while strengthening the digital literacy of health and care workers and patients and ensuring equitable access to digital solutions.

We commit to addressing health and care workforce mobility and migration in a sustainable and ethical manner, strengthening retention policies and enhancing cooperation between countries to ensure that health and care workforce mobility supports stable and resilient health systems, with full respect of the provisions of the national legislation.

We recognize that small countries can serve as agile innovators in health system transformation. We will continue to share experiences and scalable solutions that strengthen health security, health and care workforce resilience and sustainable health systems across the Region.

We call on the WHO Regional Office for Europe to continue supporting the SCI and its network, which was recognized as a good practice initiative globally, ensuring that the specific needs of small countries are reflected in regional health and care workforce and health security initiatives, and that opportunities for collaboration, technical support and knowledge exchange are strengthened.

We reaffirm our commitment to continued collaboration, recognizing that collective action and shared learning are essential to strengthening health security, addressing demographic change, and ensuring a resilient and sustainable health and care workforce.

We thank the Government of Latvia and the WHO Regional Office for Europe for hosting this meeting and for their continued commitment to advancing cooperation among small countries.

**Hosams Abu Meri**  
Minister for Health / Latvia

**Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge**  
WHO Regional Director for Europe



## References

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<sup>1</sup> Seventy-fifth Regional Committee for Europe: Copenhagen, 28–30 October 2025, Provisional agenda item 3: second European Programme of Work, 2026–2030 – “United Action for Better Health”. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe: 2025 (EUR/RC75/22; <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/382732>).

<sup>2</sup> Seventy-third Regional Committee for Europe: Astana, 24–26 October 2023: resolution: framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2023 (EUR/RC73/R1; <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/372563>).