

**Working for Ethically Sound Solutions**

**by**

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**Conference of the Ministers of Health of CoE countries**

*People on the Move: Human Rights and Challenges  
for Health Care Systems*

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Dear Ministers,

It goes without saying that the focus on human rights and dignity within the mobility of nurses, mostly women, is essential. Within the Council of Europe, a solid and unique pillar of civil society has been established over the years. I have the privilege to be the president of the Health Grouping of the CoE INGO and I send you warm regards from Annelise Oeschger, President of the INGO Conference. Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Piotr Mierzewski, Head Health Division, for his hard work and commitment to build alliances with Civil Society.

In the Health Grouping Strategic Plan 2006-2012, adopted in April 2006, the Health NGOs stressed the importance to work on "promoting equal accessibility to health in Europe". But I can provide you with some concrete evidence that while we are all discussing recommendation, the brain drain from Europe to the US is taking place. The US is recruiting urgently 800.000 nurses by 2012 and recruitment agencies are very active in the "old" Member States to recruit them now. So, "equal accessibility" is challenged in the years to come.

Therefore, the strategic support for a **qualitative and equitable health service** in Europe by means of developing a workforce of effective, competent and motivated nurses is essential to face these future challenges within your National Health System. In order to develop nursing and nurses as a strategic factor for equal access to the health care system, EFN developed ethical guidelines for employing nurses – as well as keeping nurses in the workforce. Exchange of experience between Member States, learning from each other, which strategies work and which ones do not work, is of the essence in this respect and civil society plays a crucial role in your policy-making process in order to make sure recommendation do not end up on book shelves. Therefore, the members of the CoE INGO Health grouping developed a Memorandum of Understanding of Stakeholder Approach, a framework to build synergies.

Nursing is a global profession and the international mobility of nurses is nothing new. What is new, however, is increasing large-scale, targeted, international recruitment by developed countries to address domestic shortages. EFN, a member of the CoE INGO Conference,

supports free movement of nurses and the rights of individuals to make free choices. But we are concerned about the unethical practices of recruitment and the possible exploitation of recruited nurses.

EFN is concerned that in many countries where no benchmarks exist to measure nursing resource requirements to meet health service demands, it is difficult to assess whether there are nursing shortages or surpluses. The consequence is the depletion of much needed experienced nurses in your country through large scale recruitment programs. For this reason EFN believes there is an urgent need for an independent EU workforce monitoring system to help capture information about the numbers of nurses moving. It is important to know when they are leaving and when they are coming back. Even with the EU directive 36, we do not have this type of information yet. Furthermore, the system needs to monitor the implementation of the ratified European ethical recruitment guidelines and put flesh on the bones. Aggressive recruitment practices are taking place right now and we need to act now. Hospitals, even those with a retention policy, are struggling to fill in the nursing posts and start recruiting aggressively from their neighbours and abroad. We need to know what their needs are and we need to find solution to solve the domestic challenges. The information from Eurostat is limited and a minimum workforce data set is needed as valuable tool for predicting future trends, not only from an economical perspective, but from a qualitative perspective.

Furthermore, all employers should develop good quality employee-friendly practices and consider whether nurse turnover is higher than they would expect. If this is the case, the workplace environment is not a safe, healthy or happy one, and you will not be able to retain your nurses. Failure to resolve these issues could mean that both domestic and international recruitment exercises would be ineffective anyway.

Therefore, the outcomes of this Summit are crucial to:

- Recognise the basic human right to migrate for economic or personal development reasons;
- Develop an Ethical Recruitment Framework to keep mobility safe and ethical sound;
- Put in place a Workforce Monitoring Agency to follow up the resource requirements to meet health service demands.

- Encourage employers in ensuring fair pay, good terms and conditions of employment, career development opportunities and healthy and safe working environments.

To conclude, although different political initiatives on the reform of health care systems in the Council of Europe, WHO and the European Commission are taking place at this moment, there is still a lack of political commitment to make high quality care services affordable, accessible and available to all European citizens. As the adequate qualified staffing has a direct correlation with the quality of services and patient morbidity, the support and services provided to the European citizens will necessitate high qualified nurses. Therefore the health grouping of the INGO Conference requests the Council of Europe to urge member states to plan the human resources for health, their qualifications and competences needed to guarantee quality of care and patient safety throughout Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

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