



EFN POSITION PAPER ON RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF NURSES

The recruitment and Retention of nurses stays high on the political agenda as we are not successful in developing policies which impacts on the nursing workforce and on patient outcomes. Comparable data are still not collected, nor are the methodologies to plan the workforce fit for practice.

An ageing population in Europe, which demands more healthcare services and an ageing nursing workforce necessitates a redesign of policies to safeguard safety and quality. Member States keep on facing major challenges on recruitment and retention as more nurses are retiring early due to high levels of workload and stress, especially after austerity measures hit the nursing profession hard.

As the supply line of well-educated and trained nurses was cut in some Member States, due to a reduction in the number of training places for student nurses, recruitment of nurses in the EU becomes again a key political and human rights issue. Member States start again "Robbing Peter to pay Paul", which is unethically, although a WHO [Code of Practice](#) and [Strategy](#) exists. Furthermore, being part of the [Action Plan for the EU Health Workforce](#) - Part 1 "Improve workforce planning", the current EU strategy on workforce to tackle the expected future health workforce shortage in Europe ([Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting – JA EUHWF](#)) delivers very theoretical deliverables which are almost impossible to work in practice.

Therefore, the EFN urges the Commission and Member States to urgently redesign its strategy as the quality and safety of service delivery is at stake in all EU Member States. DG Sante is currently working on a Study on Effective Health Workforce Recruitment & Retention Strategies which has produced weak recommendation. Although the recommendations for actions at European Level on recruitment and retention are a good start, such as sharing good practice, promoting monitoring and evaluation toolkits, support active cross country learning, activate existing networks, and promoting support for R&D, they do not sufficiently formulate concrete actions which have a real impact on the life and work of the nurses.

We know that workforce is context specific, that we need to choose and implement right and flexible recruitment and retention interventions, which need to be monitored and evaluated. What we need, are concrete actions in the field under EU coordination. We need to go beyond the proposed recommendations. We do not need more theoretical research, but more applied research; and more nurses and posts at the patient bedsides, wherever they are located.

The challenges of workforce planning and forecasting will not be resolved, unless Member States significantly increase the number of training places for nurses and improve their working conditions. Nurses need time to follow CPD, and this cannot be at the expense of direct patient care.

Therefore, the EFN calls on the Commission, European Parliament, Council, Health Stakeholders, and the Member States to:

- Review urgently the EU Workforce Strategy (DG Sante): we need a more practical approach to workforce planning. EFN believes the "expert group on quality and safety" needs to do the evaluation to modify the current strategy. It needs to propose concrete actions which go beyond theory, to be taken at EU, as well as Member State level to address recruitment and retention issues.
- Design recruitment policies at national and European level to making the nursing profession more attractive to domestic nurses. It is important to ensure that these recruitment policies are aligned and do not work against each other. These policies should follow the WHO Global Code of Practice, which calls for ethical practices. This can prevent the unethical recruitment of nurses and avoid shortages in some countries caused by brain drain.

- Design retention policies at national and European level. The nursing profession must be made more desirable, including improved working conditions, the opportunity for a balanced work-family life, adequate payment, and opportunities for further professional development (CPD).
- Develop a workforce composition strategy taking up the needs of the nursing workforce, including advanced roles in nursing to increase the attractiveness of the nursing profession. Only through adequate future planning, the current issues concerning the health workforce can be addressed. Comparable data needs to be collected, on how many nurses are available and how many will be needed in the future throughout the EU. For this, it is also important to assess which skills mix is needed.
- Study (Horizon 2020) the impact of "recruitment and retention" on "patient outcomes". Quality data is necessary to show the importance of a sufficient and highly qualified workforce on patient outcomes and on the quality of healthcare. Investing today in the workforce will pay off in the future. Only by knowing exactly what is necessary to ensure a sufficient nursing workforce across Europe, it is possible to start taking concrete actions.
- Implement DIR55 to prepare student nurses as "fit for practice". The Directive sets common education standards for nurses and is key in delivering safe, high quality and efficient personalised nursing care. An effective health care system need personalised healthcare, which requires nurse competences that the Directive includes, such as compatibility, keeping pace, interdisciplinarity and coordination.
- Nurses should be coordinating care possessing adequate e-skills. A health workforce able to undertake its professional duties more effectively must accompany the adoption of new technology. Without the right e-skills, these technologies will not be fully integrated into existing health systems. The EU must map the required e-skills and Member States need to ensure, that they are integrated into nursing curricula.

References:

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6. [Strategy of WHO Human Resources for Health - 2010-2015](#)
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The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)
Registration Number 476.356.013
Clos du Parnasse 11A, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 512 74 19 Fax: +32 2 512 35 50
Email: efn@efn.be Website: www.efnweb.eu