

EFN Executive Committee meets Commissioner Schmit



Today, the EFN Executive Committee and Secretary General met Commissioner Schmit, responsible for Jobs and Social Rights, European Commission.

The dialogue with Commissioner Schmit aimed at addressing a series of concrete EU actions to tackle key challenges the nursing profession is facing in the EU due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The [EFN Report on Lessons Learned from Ebola and COVID-19 \(June 2020\)](#) and the [EFN Members data collected in October 2020](#) informed the Commissioner on possible areas of cooperation between DG EMPL and EFN, as safety at work, nurses' skills, and nurses' shortage.

"In the last months, all were reminded what important job nurses are doing in our society, being the first frontline professionals in direct contact with COVID-19. With the pandemic we have to have a different look at health safety in some sectors. When we look at the situation, how many healthcare professionals have been infected, and how many have died, this shows the seriousness of this disease", said Commissioner Schmit.

Strengthening the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) to enhance and improve data collection quantifying the number of cases that were infected during the COVID-19 pandemic is key for health and safety at work. Monitoring COVID19 as an 'occupational injury' in all EU Member States is key for EFN. Unless these occupational injuries are tracked, it would be even more difficult to attract more newcomers to the nursing profession. The EFN made it clear that COVID-19 infections occurring at healthcare settings should always be recognised as an "occupational injury" for nurses across all EU Member States, as highlighted in the [EFN Report on the Biological Agent Directive](#). Once that is achieved, the EU institutions should monitor and report on the long-term effects of the COVID-19. Many nurses left the profession already, and more are considering leaving the profession due to burn out and constant exposure to risks.

The Commissioner Schmit promised "to open the debate with the EU Ministers encouraging the classification of COVID-19 infections as occupational injury".

The EFN also raised the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Semester and the new Pact for Skills, that should strengthen the capacity of the nursing workforce. The [Pact for Skills](#) initiative can look into upscaling the skills of nurses coordinating Long-Term Care leading to the EU development of Advanced Practice Nurses (APN). Strengthening Community care and Long-term care by developing a competent, well-motivated and highly educated nursing workforce is key to deliver the increasingly diverse services needed to address an ageing population and long-term care within and

across Member States. Investing in advanced roles for nurses, with special regard to the APN and nurse prescribers, will positively increase access to healthcare services for EU citizens.

“We have to give every nurse a good opportunity to be reskilled and upskilled. We need to have a different look at our health system and at how resilient it is. And we need better skilling initiatives. Our society is ageing, and the needs in this area will increase. Having skilled people is key for the future”, expressed Commissioner Schmit.

The most central discussion with the Commissioner focussed on the huge [shortage of nurses in all EU Member States](#), with a specific focus on “recruitment & retention of nurses”, which definitely links to the nurses working conditions. Poor working conditions and low wages make nurses leave the nursing profession (up till 30% in some Member States), hence deepening the existing shortages. The European Commission, DG Employment, should immediately act on improving the working conditions of the frontline nursing workforce in the EU.

As the EFN President, Elisabeth Adams, highlighted: *“Many already existing challenges for nurses have been aggravated due to the pandemic: shortages of nurses due to poor wages and bad working conditions, affecting nurses’ mental health. Wages is a big reason why the profession is not more attractive.”*

The Commissioner Schmit concluded: *“Before the crisis, in many countries there was nursing shortage, and their workload was already extremely high. This has now taken a real dramatic toll with COVID-19, and we all know that without extreme commitment of nurses we would not be able to manage this. So, we have to draw the right conclusion: we cannot just have the minimum staff numbers for the possible cases. This is not how the health system can be organised. It is not understandable that the work of those taking care of the wellbeing of the others is undervalued”.*



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