



Health for All Now!
People's Health Movement



Sheet 7: shortage of healthcare workers

Health before profit...

... Let's change Europe!

We want a Europe that fights the shortage of healthcare workers by protecting the weakest countries against the departure of professionals to the richest countries.

For the health of all, ensure quality pay and working conditions for local healthcare staff to guarantee good care.

Make these professions sustainable and make them attractive to young people.

The role of Europe

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted that Europe has decisive powers in the area of public health, going even further than Article 152 EC, which states that "a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Community policies and activities".

The EU's founding principle of the free movement and establishment of professionals and businesses entails major public health risks. Directives, for instance, attempt to harmonise training requirements, but monitoring in this area remains a national responsibility. A report by the French Senate states: *"As part of the European Semester 2020, the French report published by the European Commission on 26 February states that the conditions of access to certain regulated professions, and a certain number of regulations and fees imposed, are not conducive to investment. The Commission adds that these restrictions have a negative impact on business dynamism, competitiveness and the supply of professional services, to the detriment of the end consumer. These recommendations are in line with the observations made by the OECD: opening up the regulated professions further and continuing to simplify the regulations applicable to them could boost productivity growth and increase GDP per capita. This assimilation of healthcare professions to any other economic and commercial activity is of concern to healthcare professionals, who consider it incompatible with the exercise of missions of general interest by healthcare professionals for the benefit of patients."*¹

¹ Rapport d'information n° 563 (2019-2020) de M. [Pierre MÉDEVILLE](#), fait au nom de la commission des affaires européennes, déposé le 25 juin 2020



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Healthcare staff throughout Europe and the world, already under pressure from the cuts imposed on healthcare systems, particularly by European pressure, have paid a heavy price for the pandemic. Even though the Commission eased budgetary pressure on the Member States and released substantial resources as part of the recovery and resilience plan, the measures taken have not succeeded in reversing the pressure. A large proportion of these budgets are part of a drive to privatise and commercialise healthcare.

Pressure on national and European economies increased with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It didn't take long for budgets initially earmarked for improving the working conditions of healthcare staff to be redirected towards increased energy spending and military budgets.

The consequences were immediate:

Burnout has been widespread, despite the applause. The way out of the crisis has been catastrophic. There were no measures put in place to improve working conditions, to give staff a break and to offer a real prospect of a future for tenable professions. Instead, therapeutic pressure (pathologies not treated during the pandemic) and economic pressure (lack of income for doctors in many disciplines) led to an intensive resumption of all health activity. The shortage of staff led to a further deterioration in working conditions, fuelling a vicious circle resulting in a generalised shortage, exacerbated by negative perceptions among young people likely to join these professions.

The consequences are high absenteeism, often of long duration (burn-out, etc.), but also a departure to part-time work or other professional sectors. The reality of working in the field is no longer compatible with the elements that most often motivate healthcare staff (human aspect, global vision, etc.). The emerging negative image is further alienating young people, who no longer recognise these professions as ones with a future. The shortage is creating a cycle of deteriorating working conditions and care.

It is no longer just a question of finding solutions to improve working conditions, but of managing the shortage of professionals, which has increasing impact on the quality and accessibility of care (queues, medical deserts, concentration of operators, selection of pathologies, etc.).

The temptation to poach healthcare professionals from countries with a lower standard of living, whether in other European countries (Romania, Poland, Estonia, Portugal, etc.) or in the South (Philippines, Maghreb, etc.), is becoming intense. In Romania, a quarter of medical posts are unoccupied. In some regions of Bulgaria, only half the health staff remain.



Our priorities

- Member States' budgets must enable them to meet the health challenges of today and tomorrow (ageing population, impoverishment, chronic, mental and occupational illnesses, etc.), without increasing pressure on healthcare workers.
- Solidarity mechanisms must provide greater support for less wealthy countries, enabling them to ensure that their healthcare workers enjoy working conditions and salaries comparable to those in wealthier countries.
- Europe must impose staffing standards that guarantee the quality of care and proper working conditions.
- Wages and working conditions need to be harmonised at European level to allow real freedom of movement for professionals.
- Europe must restrict the freedom to set up in business if this has the effect of jeopardising healthcare systems in weaker countries.
- Europe must prohibit the involvement of private for-profit companies in the "white aprons trade", whether in the countries of origin or the countries of destination.