



MINISTRY OF HEALTH



World Health Organization

European Region

# High-level Regional Meeting on Health and Care Workforce in Europe: TIME TO ACT

22–23 March 2023, Bucharest, ROMANIA

# BUCHAREST DECLARATION ON THE HEALTH AND CARE WORKFORCE



1. We, participants of the WHO Regional Office for Europe Regional Meeting on the Health and Care Workforce in Bucharest, Romania, recognize that health and care workers are the backbone of any health system.
2. We note that despite the historically high numbers of health and care workers across the WHO European Region, national health systems are experiencing difficulties in meeting the increased demand for health services as a result of ageing populations, increases in chronic diseases, service backlogs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing expectations from users of services, and health threats associated with climate change and health emergencies.
3. We take account of the WHO Regional Office's report *Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act* that identifies the key workforce challenges facing national health systems, including shortages, uneven distribution, mismatches in skill-mix, insufficiencies in developing skills to meet evolving health and care needs and new digital and other technologies. The workforce is also ageing and labour markets are changing, with increasingly complex worker mobility and migration. Some countries are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain young people in the health and care workforce.
4. We note these long-standing challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also highlighted the need to protect the mental and physical health and well-being of workers, many of whom continue to experience stress, burnout and violence, with some leaving their jobs.
5. We acknowledge that governments are aware of these challenges and many are already taking important measures to address them. We recognize continued attention is needed and call for effective measures to be further amplified and strengthened in collaboration with all stakeholders. We call for experience to be shared between countries in designing and implementing solutions.
6. In line with the regional report, we call for improving the **supply** of health and care workers by:
  - generating evidence on current and future workforce needs;
  - supporting health and education institutions to adapt curricula, student selection and learning strategies, and strengthen their teaching capacity, to include the teaching of innovative and environmentally sound health and care practices;
  - building capacity for effective regulation and accreditation of the health and care workforce;
  - strengthening continuing professional development (CPD) by adapting CPD standards and approaches, encouraging leadership development and ensuring lifelong learning opportunities are available across the health and care workforce; and
  - expanding the appropriate use of digital tools to deliver more effective, efficient and accessible services.
7. We call for improvement in **retention and recruitment** of health and care workers by:
  - encouraging the use of retention measures shown to work at different stages of careers and in different locations, including those impacting on working conditions, career progression and the provision of other support;
  - ethically and effectively managing international recruitment policies in line with the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, including monitoring of migration;
  - paying special attention to retaining and attracting health and care workers in rural, remote and other underserved areas; and
  - embracing zero tolerance of violence against health and care workers.



8. We commit to optimizing the **performance** of the health and care **workforce** by:

- creating decent, safe, adequately staffed work environments and terms of employment that motivate and support health and care workers, ensure their occupational health and safety, and protect their health and mental well-being – users and services will benefit when workers are better supported;
- taking into account gender- and age-based differences in workers' risks and needs, such as burnout, violence, workplace safety, and child and family care support; and
- ensuring health and care workers' capabilities are used to the full extent in delivering health and care services.

9. We call for better **strategic health and care workforce planning** by:

- taking account of health labour market dynamics by promoting more cross-government and intersectoral action, including working with ministries of finance and education to support the future supply of health and care workers, and ensuring stakeholder engagement in all policy processes;
- strengthening health and care workforce information systems, and ensuring research and data are used to inform policy-making; and
- recognizing that women perform the majority of the paid and unpaid health and care work in most countries and that specific action needs to be taken to eliminate gender inequalities such as gender pay gaps, value unpaid care work, and promote gender balance in all decision-making positions and service delivery.

10. We call for increased and smarter **public investment** in workforce education, development and protection by:

- allocating sufficient resources for the employment of adequate numbers of health and care workers;
- optimizing the use of public investment through policies that promote performance and quality of care, including use of environmentally sound solutions;
- delineating efficient division of roles and supporting integrated multiprofessional health and care teams;
- improving digital skills among the health and care workforce;
- devising more flexible working arrangements; and
- improving working conditions and developing other policies to attract and retain health and care workers.

11. We recognize there are links between these priorities, and that to make meaningful progress it is important to involve all key stakeholders, including representatives of the health and care workforce, their employers, national ministries of finance and education, and international non-profit organizations, trusts and foundations. It is in this spirit of cooperation that we put forward this declaration.





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