

*The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) represents national medical associations across Europe. We are committed to contributing the medical profession's point of view to EU and European policy-making through pro-active cooperation on a wide range of health and healthcare related issues.*

## Input for European Parliament own-initiative report on the European Health Workforce Crisis

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the preparation of the European Parliament Own-initiative report on the European Health Workforce Crisis.

Despite growing evidence and repeated warnings, the health workforce has not been given the political priority it urgently requires. Already in 2010, the Council of the EU under the Belgian Presidency acknowledged the challenge in its Conclusions on investing in Europe's health workforce of tomorrow, highlighting current and future shortages. Fourteen years later, during the 2024 Belgian Presidency, new Council conclusions on the Future of the European Health Union once again recognised that workforce shortages and the ageing of the health workforce remain pressing challenges across all Member States. The persistence of these issues points to a lack of sustained action and follow-through.

The European Parliament's own-initiative report on the health workforce crisis could help reinforce the call to the European Commission to develop a EU strategy on Health Workforce.

### Context

- Underlines that the ongoing health workforce crisis is not solely attributable to rising retirement rates not compensated by recruitment, but is a multifaceted challenge driven by factors such as rising demands for healthcare services due to demographic shifts, the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing complexity of diseases, treatments and multimorbidity, evolving consumer expectations regarding healthcare delivery, and the declining attractiveness of medicine as a lifelong career.
- Stresses that current recruitment levels are insufficient to meet the growing healthcare needs; notes that health workforce shortages across Europe stem from a persistent imbalance between recruitment and attrition, compounded by a steadily increasing demand for healthcare services.
- Recalls that the health workforce crisis is a pan-European issue that transcends economic development levels, affecting both resource rich and resource constrained Member States.

- Emphasises that the consequences of health workforce shortages are severe and far reaching, leading to declining quality of care, reduced patient access, longer waiting times, widening health inequalities, and escalating healthcare costs while simultaneously imposing physical and mental burdens on healthcare professionals.
- Stresses that deteriorating working conditions, growing exposure to workplace violence, insufficient staffing, and lack of institutional support are placing healthcare professionals under extreme pressure, threatening the sustainability of healthcare systems across the EU.

### **Calls to Action**

- Urges the Commission to take immediate action to reverse current threats to the sustainability of the health workforce and to propose a comprehensive EU Health Workforce Strategy, aimed at addressing workforce shortages and ensuring accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare for all, while fully respecting Member States' competence for the organisation and financing of their healthcare system.
- Emphasises that addressing workforce challenges requires a multidimensional strategy that goes beyond financial support, and includes sustained investment in medical education, improved working conditions, and the development of robust health workforce planning systems. Coercive measures such as forced allocation of doctors to certain regions or financial sanctions is strongly opposed. Positive incentives are preferred options.
- Underlines that education and training standards for medical education cannot be compromised to address workforce shortages in healthcare, and that minimum education and training requirements specified in Directive 2005/36/EC on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications must be upheld to ensure a high level of quality of care and patient safety. It is underlined that these are minimum requirements need to be built on to adequately reflect evolving healthcare .
- Stresses that improving working conditions is the most effective primary preventive measure to protect the well-being of healthcare professionals; highlights the urgent need to address psychosocial risks at work, and to enhance the attractiveness of the medical profession.
- Encourages the European Commission and Member States to ensure the effective enforcement of existing EU labor legislation including the European Working Time Directive to uphold safe and lawful working conditions for doctors.
- Recognises that access to high quality education and training, including structured career pathways and opportunities for specialization, is essential for the retention and motivation of medical professionals.

- Calls for the harmonisation and improvement of health workforce data collection, including comparable and disaggregated data on the number of practicing healthcare professionals, to support evidence-based workforce planning.