

Statement by Greens/EFA MEPs and national green MPs

There is a shortage of 2 million healthcare workers in the European Union, and the European Council must address the issue.

On June 12th, the members of the European Council will meet to discuss employment policies, social affairs, health, and consumer protection. Healthcare professionals have been sounding the alarm for months about the lack of personnel to provide adequate care to patients. However, this issue is not on the Council's agenda, which is not acceptable.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare professionals across Europe were raising the alarm about the lack of staff. Incomplete teams, professional burnout, workplace violence, occupational diseases, an unacceptable balance between professional and personal life – the list of problems was long and remained unanswered. And yet, healthcare professionals have given far more than could be realistically expected under these conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the facts are clear: Europe is currently facing a shortage of 2 million healthcare workers, our healthcare systems are on the brink of collapse, and access to healthcare for all Europeans is no longer guaranteed. Therefore, it is of absolute urgency to take coordinated measures at the European level.

In January, the OECD published a damning report on the lack of resilience in our healthcare systems¹, directly highlighting the fact that the healthcare "workforce limitations proved to be a more binding constraint than the availability of hospital beds." Structural underinvestment in public healthcare, austerity measures, and the privatization of healthcare systems have significantly deteriorated the working conditions of healthcare personnel over the years and have made healthcare no longer an attractive career choice in Europe.

We believe that rebuilding better public health systems, starting with addressing healthcare staffing shortages, must be an absolute priority on the EU's political agenda. It is therefore not acceptable to wait several more months before making decisions. In this regard, the Council meeting from last December did not demonstrate its effectiveness on the ground, so the issue must be put back on the agenda on the 12th of June.

Currently, Member States are competing to attract healthcare personnel, and patients are being denied access to care or placed on waiting lists for several months. This is not the Union that European citizens have called for during the Conference on the Future of Europe, where access to quality healthcare held a significant place in their demands for the European project.

Therefore, to address this common problem, we call on European government leaders to take the following measures:

¹ OECD (2023), Ready for the Next Crisis? Investing in Health System Resilience, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1e53cf80-en>

- Address the investment deficit in public healthcare systems by fully utilizing all available European funds, such as EU4Health, the Digital Europe program, Horizon Europe, the RRF, the Cohesion Fund, and the Regional Development Fund.
- Report to national parliaments and the European Parliament on coordinated actions and investments made in the EU to address healthcare staffing shortages, in order to closely monitor improvements in access to care.
- Ensure that rural and disadvantaged areas receive special attention when investing EU funds to improve access to care for all.
- Take appropriate measures, including leveraging the use of digital services, to support work-life balance measures for healthcare personnel in the EU.
- Establish coordinated policies for retaining healthcare professionals in the EU, particularly to avoid competition within the EU.
- Strengthen social dialogue and promote collective bargaining as provided for in Directive (EU) 2022/2041, particularly with a view to improving salary determination and working conditions for healthcare personnel.
- Request and support the proposal for a directive on psychosocial risks at work by the European Commission in order to better integrate the impact of work on the health of healthcare workers and improve prevention throughout Europe.
- Improve access to employment opportunities in the healthcare sector for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers residing in the EU by expediting the recognition of their healthcare and caregiving qualifications and facilitating access to education and language training.

Europe is not just a common market; it is an essential instrument for addressing social challenges. The shortage of healthcare personnel is a striking example. Member States, if isolated, will not be able to tackle it. That is why we call on European government leaders to coordinate without further delay.

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